

Paul Gallico

CONFESSIONS
OF
A
STORY-
TELLER



London

MICHAEL JOSEPH

First published by
MICHAEL JOSEPH LTD
26 Bloomsbury Street
London, W C 1
1961

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1953, 1956, 1960 © copyright by Curtis
Publishing Co., 1937, 1938, 1939, 1941, 1951,
1952, 1954, 1955, 1956

*Set and printed in Great Britain by Tonbridge Printers Ltd,
Peach Hall Works, Tonbridge, Kent, in Caledonia ten on
eleven point, on paper made by Henry Bruce at Currie,
Midlothian, and bound by James Burn at Esher, Surrey*

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO MY SONS

William Taylor and Robert Leston Gallico

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CONFESSIONS OF A STORY-TELLER

Mainly Autobiographical

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Some years ago I was flattered to receive an invitation to address the members of the Eton Literary Society upon some subject connected with writing which might be considered of interest to this young generation. The flattery contained in this, as far as I was concerned, was that I was the first American writer, and perhaps the only one, up to that time to be requested to give such an address.

It was, however, not my first connection with this famous school, for each year on St Andrews Day I am also invited to journey thither as a member of a fencing team to fence *épée* against the Etonian swordsmen. Thus I had learned to know Etonians and what they were like.

They were, it seemed to me, like any other boy who was quite likely to be bored stiff, even if he was a member of the Literary Society, through being compelled to sit still for an hour while some adult caracolled about on his literary hobby horse. I thought my young hosts might be grateful for a little unexpected entertainment.

Before delivering my lecture I was given dinner at Eton by the secretary of the Society, a most handsome young man clad in white tie and tails to which was added a coloured waistcoat of simply stunning magnificence denoting that he was a member, I gathered, of a most exclusive and exalted society. During the course of the dinner he asked me for the title of my address and when I suggested *BELLES LETTRES VERSUS A PUNCH IN THE NOSE, OR HOW TO BEGIN A LITERARY CAREER FROM THE RECLINING POSITION*, I could feel the shock waves extending back through three centuries of Literary Societies.

The young man tried hard not to show his disapproval and took the attitude that I was pleased to be facetious. I said that I had never been more serious, that the title was apt and relevant as would develop and would they take my word for it. The young secretary exchanged baffled and bewildered glances with

his acolytes and then gamely acquiesced. But I could see a number of mental reservations forming in young minds about inviting any more Americans.

The evening was notable in the annals of the Literary Society from the fact that to the great joy of its members the lecture avoided the subject of literature and was devoted to pugilism and the brief moment when my career and that of Jack Dempsey, the former heavyweight champion of the world, collided in a training ring at Saratoga Springs, New York. The year was 1922, when Dempsey was training to defend his title against the giant Argentinian, the late Luis Angel Firpo.

It did not take long to affirm the validity of the title I had suggested for I told them the story of an unknown sports reporter sent to cover the training camp of the champion. This reporter conceived the idea of entering the ring to spar with the latter in order to be able to write more convincingly what it was like to have the fist of the world champion connect with one's chin in battle.

The young sports writer found out and had plenty of time to reflect upon it while sojourning on the canvas, where he had been deposited by a Dempsey left hook, listening to the referee toll off a count which could have proceeded to 150 for all that I was concerned.

The point was that this brash stunt tickled the fancy of J. M. Patterson, publisher of the 'Daily News', for whom I was working, and led him to promote me not only to the Sports Editorship of his newspaper but to let me take on the writing of a sports column.

Perhaps it was something of an American exaggeration to hold that my career as a writer was based upon this stunt and this knock-out, but the sports column, a thousand words in length appeared thereafter for thirteen years, seven days a week. It was uncensored and uninhibited, it had to be in the hands of the composing room no later than six o'clock in the evening and the ideas transmitted to the cartoonist who illustrated it even earlier. It forced me to write every day, rain or shine, whether I felt like it or not, sick or well, happy or unhappy. It gave me that discipline without which no writer can hope to succeed. It formed working habits and thinking habits since a new idea had to be presented each day, or an old theme treated in a novel manner so that it seemed like a new idea. But above all it made me write, write, write. Roughly over that period, not counting other sports stories and coverages of sports events, I turned out some five million one hundred and ten thousand words. I must reiterate

if one wants to be a writer there is no substitute for writing Talking about it or just thinking beautiful thoughts isn't enough Writing like everything else is a muscle and the more you use it the more flexible and useful it becomes

I had wanted to be a writer for as long as I can remember My infantile years were filled with fantasies and imaginings and castles sent soaring into the sky I wrote my first short story at the age of ten, one evening in an hotel in Brussels back in 1907 when we visited the World's Fair being held there, my parents and I, on their annual summer holiday

They left me alone in the hotel one night, to my distress, while they went out to do the town There was pen and ink and hotel stationery available The creative urge was overpowering I had had this idea for a story for some time, ever since I had passed a construction site on Madison Avenue in the sixties where a new building was going up near where we lived

I am going to insist upon telling you the plot because I was unable to get it published at the time and this has rankled

Briefly a little boy wanders past the site and notices a pile of coloured pebbles on the sidewalk and a large Eyetalian - all construction workers in New York in those days seemed to be Eyetalians - is engaged in shovelling these stones into a wheelbarrow

Small boy is fascinated with these pebbles and wishing to acquire some, for purposes never quite made clear in the story, begins to fill his pockets with them The large Eyetalian either apparently outraged by this bald-faced larceny or simply failing sympathy with the needs of small boys, flies into a temper and cries, 'Hey you, beat it! Wotsamarra you? Gerrada here! Put-a dem stones-a back Beat it'

Terrified the little boy puts the stones back and beats it The Eyetalian finishes his stint of shovelling the stones into the wheelbarrow and thereafter is summoned to other duties atop the steel skeleton of the building thirteen storeys above the ground

There sudden disaster overtakes him! A mis-step, a slip! He falls, yet manages to seize a girder with his hands and there he is dangling in mid-air thirteen storeys above certain death

Fellow workers shout to him to hang on until they can reach him Help is almost at hand as they converge upon him The Eyetalian holds on for dear life, but alas feels himself tiring, his strength rapidly waning, his grip beginning to weaken Closer and closer comes the rescue party Tireded and tireded grows the

Wop, as they were called in those days Will he be able to last?
Can they reach him in time?

Looking back over the years I am pleased to note that even at a tender age I had some feeling for the element of suspense Had this been a serial, here would have been the place to have written 'Continued next week' However, this was to be a complete short story with all the unities preserved

Now for the twist! Willing hands are almost upon him, reaching forth to cheat the angel of death when the desperate clutch of the Eyetalian's fingers are loosed and as he plunges with a shriek to his death this awful retributive thought passes through his mind (I was too young and inexperienced to know at that time that, of course, what would have flashed through his mind at that point was his past life)

'Oh,' thinks he, 'would that I had not been so cruel to that little boy who wished to fill his pockets with pebbles earlier this afternoon Had I permitted him to do so there would have been one less shovelful of stones for me to shovel and I would have now had just that one little bit more energy and strength I needed to hang on until help arrived'

Too late, too late! As the Eyetalian plunges past the 12th, 11th and 10th floors more Eyetalians working there hear him murmur regretfully as he passes, 'Just a li'l shovel of stones-a, just a li'l sh-shovel full-a stones-a' And after that only the well known dull and sickening thud

The title of this story was JUST A SHOVEL OF STONES and I was charmed with it This was the days before psychiatry, psychoanalysis and the cult of the head shrinkers, and it has been suggested since that at the bottom of this juvenile grand Guignol lay the fact that I hated my Italian-born father and wished to kill him and so turned him into the big Eyetalian construction worker and neatly dropped him from the top of a building

I doubt this. I may have been irritated with my dad that evening for parking me in the hotel while he and my mother went forth to revel, but not to the point of vicarious assassination Consciously I adored my father, though I was sometimes terrified of him

I am now too old a fox to bet either on or against the subconscious but I know that I had been carrying this short story around with me for many months in my mind, monkeying with it and polishing it up before I set it down on paper, a process in no wise changed in later life professionally I have carried stories around inside me for over a year before they came right to the point where they warranted setting down on paper

I can tell you better why I am publishing it now and why a version of it also appeared in an earlier edition of these stories when my father was still alive Eight or nine years later when I was a young man and bombarding the magazines with short story attempts which, like homing pigeons, returned inevitably to the doorstep a day or so later with a printed rejection slip, I used to have Mozart thrown into my face

I am still amazed that Mozart remains my favourite composer and that I can never get enough of listening to his music, for in my youth he was held up to me as an example Mozart, at the age of twelve, according to my father, himself a pianist and a composer, had already composed several symphonies, an opera or so, innumerable quartets and what is more had had them performed, while here I was a lolloping big looby all of eighteen to nineteen years and already a failure I could not even get a short story accepted and printed From which you will gather that I was no infant prodigy and that I was likewise born into a European household transplanted into America where the young were expected to produce

I published this originally so I could say to dad, 'Who was this Mozart of twelve? An old man! Get me at ten Pop, here it is in a book' Father roared with laughter. By that time he was reconciled to the fact that his son was irremediably a late starter I reprinted it herewith dedicated to his memory

My father, Paolo Gallico, was an Italian of Spanish extraction, a concert pianist, composer and teacher, born in Mantua in Lombardy My mother was Austrian In 1895 they emigrated to New York whence my father went on a number of concert tours throughout the United States I was born in New York City in July of 1897, just in time to avoid the twentieth century In one generation I became more American than the sons and daughters of the American Revolution I was educated in the free public schools of New York - Public School 6 at Madison Avenue and 85th Street, Public School 70 at 75th Street and 3rd Avenue and the De Witt Clinton High School at 10th Avenue and 59th Street

In 1916 I entered Columbia University and graduated therefrom in 1921 with a Bachelor of Science Degree, having lost a year and a half due to World War 1 On my 21st birthday in 1918 I enlisted in the US Naval Reserve Force where due to defective eyesight I was placed in the loathsome category of yeoman

Once in the Service, however, I managed by means of High School football experience to effect a transfer into a combat branch and emerged after Armistice Day with the more respect-

able rating of gunner's mate Discharged from the Navy I spent half a year working for a small newspaper syndicate and then returned to Columbia to take my degree

The Science Degree is a part of the story, for I had intended to be a doctor

This is no contradiction to what I said earlier that for as long as I could remember I wished to be a writer I still wished to be a writer, or rather a story-teller, but I was not at all certain that A I could be a good one and B earn a living with it

For some reason never quite clear to me writing was hooked up in my youthful mind with insecurity Perhaps in some subtle fashion I was aware that writing was a kind of luxury profession, just as was music and piano teaching I think there was a financial panic once during my childhood and I must have heard my parents refer to the fact that when money got tight the first thing that happened was that people stopped junior's piano lessons But these same people never stopped calling for the doctor, no matter how tight money might be At that age I didn't realise they just didn't pay him

I shudder to think of the number of lives saved by my abandoning medicine But when I was a boy around New York I did have a certain flair for it I was the one who had the first-aid kit and when one of the gang hurt himself or acquired a cut or a bruise I knew how to wash it out with hydrogen peroxide, daub it with iodine and apply a fairly competent bandage

I cannot remember any time from my earliest days when I was not aware that I should have to earn a living and that I must prepare myself for that day We were not poor people, but neither were we well off and I think from an understanding of this and the precariousness of a professional life stemmed a curious kind of cowardice which at the age of fourteen or fifteen led me to rearrange my ambitions and organise my life along the following lines 'Medicine,' I said to myself 'is a secure and certain profession People will always need a doctor Therefore I will become one and always have the means of earning a living and I will write on the side Then it will make no difference if I fail to sell what I write.'

Accordingly when at the age of nineteen I entered Columbia University as a freshman, I registered for the pre-medical course which called for two years of ordinary college study with the emphasis on chemistry and biology, in other words the sciences, after which I would go into the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the medical school known as P and S Two close boyhood friends of mine were embarked upon the same course During

those two years I wrote stories constantly and with no more success Mozart, it was pointed out to me, at this age was a European celebrity I had yet to sell a single story

At the end of my sophomore year, as the time drew near to enter Medical School I took stock of myself and my ambitions, the plans I had made, and arrived at the conclusion that they were infantile and that I was just plain yellow I knew in my own heart that more than anything else I wanted to be a writer and that the whole idea of embracing medicine and becoming a doctor was cowardly and an evasion

I can still look back and remember having one of those moments of clarity which sometimes illuminate the dark pathway And in that moment I became aware that I would be a fool to dissipate my energies and that success in anything called for the utmost concentration in that field If I genuinely and honestly loved writing as I felt I did then I ought to concentrate upon becoming a writer and let nothing else divert me or stand in my way

This was a decision which not only had to be arrived at by myself but also implemented by me Without taking my elders into my confidence I withdrew my application to enter Medical School, threw over the pre-medical course, though I was committed to majoring in science, but I added as many subjects in writing and literature as I could and put medicine out of my life The bridges were irretrievably burned

During all my four years at the University I lived at home but maintained my independence by working my way through, paying for my tuition and keep by means of a variety of jobs - tutor, translator, longshoreman, usher at the Metropolitan Opera, librarian, gymnasium attendant, labourer in a spark plug factory, college correspondent for a downtown newspaper or whatever odd jobs the employment agency at the University could dredge up for me I also took part in University activities, won my numerals and letters rowing on the Freshman and Varsity crews and functioned as captain in my senior year

And what about writing at this period and the immediate results of the great decision? Looking back the best I can say is that I never gave up trying and success was meagre I did proceed from the horrid impersonality of the rejection slip to the personally typewritten note from the editor, a few brief lines to the effect that while the story submitted had not quite made the grade they would like to see more of my work at some future date And I can tell you this come-on was enough to have me walking on air for weeks I had almost made it Perhaps the next one would hit

When I was twenty-one I sold my first story to a pulp magazine I think it was 'Blue Book' I haven't the faintest recollection what it was about, but I got ninety dollars for it, which is probably more than Mozart got for his first opera

A 'pulp magazine' incidentally is a cheap periodical published on a cheap grade of paper, hence the nickname 'pulp' as against the richer publications which were known as 'slicks' The word slick had no connotation in connection with the contents of these magazines, it didn't refer to the stories being glib or clever It related instead, as indicated, to the quality of the paper The richer publications used a coated stock which made it slippery or slick to the touch The reason for the coated stock was that it reproduced four-colour illustrations In those days 'Blue Book,' 'Argosy,' and 'Adventure' were pulp magazines 'Saturday Evening Post,' 'Cosmopolitan,' 'Red Book,' 'American Magazine' were slicks The pulp might pay \$125 for a short story, the slick would pay \$1,000 and upwards Naturally it was my ambition to sell to the slicks Nor could success at cracking the pulp market be considered a step in that direction It was a strange fact that pulp writers remained pulp writers and rarely did anyone who had made a name for himself writing for the pulps over a period manage to cross the line and break into the slicks However, at that time I did not know this and if I had I should not have cared The point was I had made a sale I was probably saved from the fate of a pulp hack by my discovery of a new kind of market

During my interim job as office boy for the Otis F Wood syndicate between emerging from the Navy and returning to college I learned something about the syndicate business, chiefly that if one had a saleable literary property one could dispose of it a number of times to various newspapers in different cities of the United States During my last two years at Columbia I devised short fiction sketches - what would be called short shorts today, and modelled after the late American story classicist O Henry who was fashionable then and whose style and formulae were the basis of study in every short story class at that time O Henry was the master of the unexpected twist at the end, a twist which incidentally was carefully and unobtrusively planted in the narrative at the beginning of the story Even today anyone wanting to write short stories would do well to read O Henry

These short stories I syndicated and sold myself, submitting them to Sunday papers in Boston, Philadelphia, Detroit, Chicago, etc I regret to say New York remained unimpressed and absent from my list of customers These newspapers paid me space rates

for these stories Sometimes I got as high as \$20 apiece for them.

During my years at the University I went through the mill of short-story writing classes I studied with John Erskine, Helen Hull, Dr Blanche Colton Williams, Walter Pitkin, Donald Lemon Clark and Thomas Uzzell Some of these classes were given in the University extension school and others were private evening classes conducted by these teachers and into which I paid my way I am compelled to report that I was an undistinguished pupil who sold none of the efforts or exercises written for those classes There were others who did and received cheques from 'Harpers' or 'Atlantic Monthly,' or even the big checks I remained unrewarded and consumed with jealousy

I attended classes, wrote stories, had them reviewed and criticised, learned the jargon to which the art had been reduced by the pedagogues, and sold nary a line But I have a dreadful recollection that not only did I not sell, but I became so saturated with the rules and regulations of storycraft, the mechanics and mathematics of construction, that I actually taught the stuff to small groups outside the university to eke out my college living. Why my students went for it and ever paid me money, or what good they got out of it, I shall never know

When beginning writers ask me whether they should take a short-story course, I tell them yes, because I feel it cannot do them any harm and it might do them some good If nothing else, it sets them to writing regularly.

Eighty-five per cent of the students of every writing or story course is made of frustrated and utterly talentless and feckless folk who are lured by the gold in them thar hills and the apparent ease with which successful writers appear to be able to tap the vein They may be encountered in the extension courses year after year, hopefully but unsuccessfully pursuing the chimera The simple truth is that they are neither writers nor story-tellers and never will be, if they go to school for a hundred years

But where a man or woman has a natural talent for expressing himself with the written word, originality and a good recording ear for the reproduction of the speech of others, these classroom sessions unquestionably, to my mind, can help him They frequently provide short cuts and save him time If he must struggle and suffer and learn what to do and how to do it by himself, at least he can acquire there a foundation in what not to do

I never heard of a writer coming to any harm in such a class and in 1948 when I was asked by Columbia whether I would teach an advanced short-story class in the extension school I accepted on condition that I be allowed to choose my students on

the basis of some submitted work I didn't want to waste time on the hopeless ones

I worked for a year with a bright, talented group and oddly enough experienced here the thrill of success which had eluded me when I was a student. Several members of my class sold stories to magazines either during or immediately after the course. I am sure they would have sold them anyway, but the pleasure of having assisted at their incubation to development was inescapable. I gave up teaching because I couldn't bear to be tied down to the academic year.

After graduating from Columbia in 1921, I married and took the first job that was offered to me by my friends in the University employment office. This was as a review secretary for the National Board of Motion Picture Review, which was the voluntary censorship to which the motion picture producers agreed in the face of the threat of State or Federal censorship. A half a year later I became motion picture critic for the New York 'Daily News,' the fledgling tabloid founded by Joseph Medill Patterson of the 'Chicago Tribune,' and there I lasted exactly four months and twenty-nine days. On the thirtieth day I was removed from the chair by Captain Patterson because my reviews were too Smart Alecky. I was not fired from the 'News,' this was not the custom of the publisher. He merely, in a fit of exasperation, told his Managing Editor, Phil Payne, to get that man out of the movie department. Payne hid me in the sports department as an anonymous and un-bylined sports reporter, odd jobs and re-write man.

• And here we return to the subject of my discourse at Eton, namely how to begin a literary career from the prone or horizontal position.

Assigned to write some 'colour' from the Dempsey training camp at Uncle Tom Luther's at Saratoga, myself a heavyweight still in good condition after four years as a galley slave but with no experience of boxing, I asked Dempsey if he would let me into the ring with him in order that I might find out at first hand what it was like.

As I have indicated the results were drastic since I was unknown and for all Dempsey and his camp were aware might be a ringer sent to injure him or make him look bad. But any rate after one minute and twenty-seven seconds I was flat on my back with a cut lip and a prize headache. But I also had a story. In an old-fashioned narrative one might say that in this manner my fortune was made. Certainly it was the beginning. There were other elements, but the fact was that the left hook that Dempsey

whistled to my unprotected chin changed the frown on the face of Captain Patterson to a smile

I wrote no more fiction for nearly eight years but applied myself to my job as Sports Editor and columnist of the 'Daily News' and the necessity of earning a living for my family and myself. But while fiction was temporarily shelved I was writing, writing, writing, day in and day out, Sundays included

Every writer has a different story of his beginnings and of how he obtained the needed practice and training for his craft, including those geniuses who need no training but do it right the first time, but for me sports writing was a wonderful incubator

Reporting the American sports scene was story-telling, a rich and inexhaustible lode of dramatic material. Daily I was in contact with those necessary elements of drama, good against evil, suspense, frustration, climax and success. Every contest had its villain as well as its hero. We wrote partisan sports in New York. Our teams, our boys were heroes, the visiting firemen were villains. I lived and worked in an era of great personalities in sports, Dempsey, Babe Ruth, Helen Wills, Tilden, Ty Cobb, Johnny Weissmuller, Man o'War, Paavo Nurmi, etc., all of them highly colourful and dramatic men and women which sense of drama was reflected in their contests and performances. Reporting sports was a constant exercise in presenting dramatic material in a dramatic fashion

I became involved at the same time in sports promotion and was led into curious by-paths which, oddly enough, likewise was grist to the mill of the would-be writer, for it taught me showmanship, though I was aware of none of these things during those years

Shocked by the wretched and sordid manner in which amateur boxing was conducted in New York in those days I persuaded Captain Patterson to let me stage an amateur tournament and invented the Golden Gloves and thereafter in addition to my work as editor, reporter and columnist promoted such sports extravaganzas as roller- and ice-skating races, water circuses, golf driving contests, and a thoroughly mad canoe race around Manhattan Island

It was a fast, gay, wonderful and completely thoughtless life. Winter sports merged into summer sports, the season and years flowed by

To increase my understanding of the problems faced by the men and women about whom I wrote and to be able better to describe their skills I experimented with active participation with

some of these stars so as to be better able to describe the games I was reporting

The speedboat king of that era was an American boat-builder by the name of Gar Wood. He took me for a ride in one of his 'Miss America's' on the Detroit river at 125 miles an hour. I sat in a racing car with one of America's leading race drivers for a spin around the Indianapolis track. I familiarised myself with major league baseball by going on to the field during the practice sessions before a game to try to hit against the fireball pitcher or catch his curves. In the same manner I learned the difficulties and ruggedness of American football, a game I had played myself in High School. I stood helpless on a tennis court while the drives of Vincent Richards and Helen Wills whistled past my ears and, of course, was equally feckless on a golf course against Bobby Jones. But the close-up I received of the ability and timing of these stars was of course invaluable. I also learned to fly, took out a pilot's licence and logged some 500 solo hours and began covering some sports events from the air.

Nobody censored my copy or told me what to write or what not to write, or what to do or where to go or what to cover as long as I remained within the laws of libel. My column became known as the 'News' increased in circulation and stature, and myself a minor celebrity recognised by taxi drivers as one of the 'Young men of Manhattan' along with such well-known sports-writers as Damon Runyon, Bill Corum, Dan Parker, Joe Williams, etc. Our seats at the working press benches in Madison Square Garden had our names emblazoned in bronze plaques.

Here was success from an unexpected quarter, financial, social, etc., and the would-be fiction writer became submerged yet never wholly forgotten, I still looked forward to the day when I would 'make' the 'Saturday Evening Post'. It took me twenty-five years to achieve this ambition, that is to say from 1907 when I was ten, the age at which I wrote my first story, to 1933 when I was thirty-six years old.

I began gradually by breaking into the better magazines with sports articles. This was the easy way for I had all of the material at the tips of my fingers and the writing muscle was limbered. It was just a matter of acquiring the more leisurely slant of the monthly publication as against the immediacy of the daily journal. And here I had another stroke of luck, I wrote and sold several articles to 'Vanity Fair,' which in those days, in class and sophistication, occupied the position the 'New Yorker' does now. Its Editor was the late Frank Crowninshield, and the late Don Freeman was Managing Editor. The Associate Editor was Clare

Boothe Brokaw, afterwards Congresswoman and then Ambassador Clare Luce I was invited to join their staff as an Associate Editor

The publisher, the late Condé Nast, gave us all a free hand and the magazine was a wonderful and crackling proving ground for young writers. It printed anything I wrote and the editors egged me on to try all kinds of things including short pieces of fiction. In addition to my own byline I had five assorted pen names under which I wrote. Sometimes I had as many as three pieces in one issue under different names. The schooling and the encouragement I received were priceless.

In 1931 I acquired an agent, Harold Ober, and we have been together ever since and when he died in 1959 I felt that I had lost a second father.

Oddly enough it was not sports or a sports story which sparked my demolishing the barrier between the big time and myself and enabled me to break into the 'Saturday Evening Post' after so many years of endeavour and desk drawers filled with rejection slips, but the city side.

A news story broke one Christmas, a night editor performed a near miracle of getting it into the paper and thereby excited my imagination and capacity for hero worship. The story of this story and its subsequent landing me in the 'Saturday Evening Post' is told in the preamble to MCKABE, the first short story in this book. Its sale and publication resulted in giving me the one thing I had lacked up to that moment, and without which I maintain no writer can function. That lack was self-confidence. From then on all my 'writing on the side' was concentrated upon fiction and my stories began to appear regularly in the 'Saturday Evening Post' and later in other magazines as well.

This is not intended as a blueprint for anyone who wishes to become a professional writer, I am just telling you what happened to me.

In 1936 I took the decisive step of changing my entire way of life. I resigned my job as one of the then highest-paid sports-writers in the country, setting alight a perfect holocaust of bridges and went abroad to try in the future to earn my living as a freelance writer of fiction, make or break. I was thirty-nine and running scared.

What was I scared of? Of failing and having to go back to sports-writing! Previously I had become aware that I was in danger of letting the wrong kind of success go to my head and becoming that prize bore, the veteran sports-writer, of having years creep up on me with my boyhood and lifelong ambition fulfilled, of

being a success in the eyes of the world and a failure to myself

Once while I was sitting at the ringside in Madison Square Garden preparing to send a round-by-round account of the main event to my office, a colleague arrived late, climbed into his seat while the principals were being introduced, and, standing up, took his own sweet time over parking his typewriter, removing his overcoat, and counting the house. An irritated customer sitting in one of the ringside seats whose view was being blocked shouted 'Siddown! You're nothing but a sports-writer!'

The words were not addressed to me, I was already sitting down, but they went through me like an arrow piercing the heart, for I too was nothing but a sports-writer. It was not the denigration that hurt for there was nothing dishonourable about being a sports-writer, it was a well-regarded and highly paid profession with its own pride. The searing truth held up before me was that this was not what I had set out to be.

I think, in fact I am certain, that my decision to go for broke dated from that evening which took place sometime in 1934. It was two years before I was able to implement it, but the decision had been made and I knew that I would go through with it. In 1936 one of my short stories sold to the movies for \$5,000. It was a stake which would enable me to live for a while and write stories. If they sold, well and good. If they didn't .

I resigned from the 'Daily News,' went to England and rented a cottage in the little fishing village of Salcombe on the South Devonshire coast, 214 miles from London, and remained there a few months before going on to the Continent.

Ever since then I have earned my living as a writer. I never forgot my cottage in Devon or the charm of the little village town. The annual bass run off Salcombe in November is something to gladden the heart of any fisherman and I rarely miss it, for one of my hobbies is fishing.

Twice thereafter there was a kind of a half-way turning back but not because I had failed to sell my stories, but rather because I felt that through fourteen years of watching and writing about athletes I had become one-sided. I was still sufficiently naive as to believe that I had to experience things properly to write about them. I had not yet wholly learned to trust my imagination and even more my instincts. In the winter I went back to the 'News' as a reporter on the City side to learn the business or to come in contact with that thing known as 'life'. The following winter I signed with INS as a feature writer to do special stories.

I soon found out that this nonsense was costing me money since

my assignments interfered with my writing and that furthermore working as a news reporter was not teaching me any more about things and people I didn't know already I was simply wasting my time Thereafter I did no more reporting except for a brief period during the war when I took an assignment as a war correspondent

In connection with the above I might say that life for a writer, at least for this one, is a constant series of alarms and excursions, of self-pamperings and self-delusions There is always some distant place, a thatched cottage in England, a hacienda in Mexico, where, if you could only be, you would turn out the lyric prose, and deeply significant stories that you find you cannot do wherever you happen to find yourself

This is of course sheer nonsense, but it is a harmless kind of nonsense It keeps one hoping and helps one to get around I managed to achieve the house in England, the villa in Mexico, the chalet in Liechtenstein and many other places, and they were never the answer One of the few stories that ever gave me any satisfaction was written in snatches on railroad trains and hotel rooms while I was batting around the country as a reporter I have written in furnished rooms, on boats, in the city, in the country, and in aeroplanes If I have something that I want to write, I know that I can do it anywhere and under any conditions But I will not relinquish the cherished illusion of the need for far places I don't even mind knowing it is a fake It is delightful window-dressing What one actually needs to write is an idea, a typewriter, a roof over one's head and three square meals a day, because writing is physical as well as mental work and therefore hungry-making All one really gets out of the delusion that ideas will burn and words flow three or four thousand miles away from the place where one is at the moment, is a pleasant and diverting way of living and the broadening that comes with travel

One is always seeking the touchstone that will dissolve one's deficiencies as a person and a craftsman And one is always bumping up against the fact that there is none except hard work, concentration and continued application

From 1938 on I have been a freelance professional writer, turning out short stories, serials, novels, film scripts, articles and essays My market at first was limited to American magazines, the 'Saturday Evening Post,' 'Cosmopolitan,' 'Good Housekeeping,' 'American Magazine' and the defunct 'Collier's' and 'Liberty' I have also written for 'Readers' Digest,' 'Esquire,' 'The New Yorker' and many others, and in later years my stories have appeared in publications abroad and in translation

Some of my books have become best-sellers, others have appeared and vanished without so much as causing a ripple, and others still, to my greatest satisfaction, have maintained a quiet and steady circulation over a long period of years. I have had a few minor triumphs, some failures and down through the years an extraordinary amount of luck. If you were to ask me what so far in my thirty years career as a professional writer has given me the most satisfaction, I would tell you that it is the fact that in the Times Bookshop in Wigmore Street in London, as well as in Foyles, Hatchards and one or two other bookshops at Christmas time I have my own individual table where all of my books are displayed, from *SNOW GOOSE*, which was first published in 1941, to perhaps include this current volume.

All these things, with other evidences of popularity, a comfortable way of life, a house in the South of France, etc., are accounted in this world as solid success with every indication of security. I am still dissatisfied with things that I write and I am still insecure.

Since these are listed as confessions I will confess to you that from the time I resigned from the 'News' a quarter of a century ago up to and including this very moment I have never had a single moment of security. Mark this down as one of the occupational hazards of freelance writing for a living. Or if this is too gloomy a view ascribe it to my own personal neuroticism and perhaps infantilism, for even today when I have completed a manuscript and sent it to agent or publisher I await the verdict with the same anguish, fear and doubts, that I did when I was a boy and despatched a manuscript to a magazine with the usual stamped, addressed envelope enclosed for return.

The euphoria connected with an acceptance lasts for a week or ten days, after which the reaction sets in. Can I keep it up? Will I be able to do it again? What will the next one I write be like?

I should be more upset at these palpable evidences of neuroticism if most writers, male and female, with whom I have exchanged shop-talk had not confessed to some similar instances of disillusionment and insecurity which expressed themselves in one form or another. And we were all agreed that nothing was quite so shattering as a rejection or a sour notice or criticism from an editor, and the further along we went in our professions, the more damaging were the results of such a rejection. The first thought that arises to harass every writer when a piece is bounced, for whatever reason, is 'I'm through I'm all washed up. This is the end. I can never write again. I've lost the touch.' One feels as help-

less, dejected, and amateurish as the veriest tyro or beginner, as though one had to start learning over again

Of course it is sheer nonsense, of course one writes again because one must, and if the subsequent piece is accepted with hosannahs, or merely accepted and paid for, all one's oozed confidence comes flooding back again and one rides atop the world—until the next fall

I have always maintained that every successful writer is primarily a good editor, a premise that usually drives editors into tantrums when I tell it to them. But when the writer sits down to his typewriter to tell a story that he will offer for sale, he has already fulfilled most of the functions of editor. He has chosen his subject for timeliness, reader interest, the style of magazine at which it is aimed, the known likes and dislikes of the editor of that particular literary variety show, and the current state of mind of the public. He trims his material and sews his seam in a manner designed to be pleasing to all concerned. I maintain that's editing. The editor in the end merely confirms or denies one's judgment.

The hazards remain large, even after you have what the laymen likes to call a 'name,' and very often the greater the name, the stricter the standards set by the editor. The writer invests an idea, research, time, energy, and hard labour in the preparation of a story. At the end of three weeks or a month he has some fifteen to twenty pages of typescript. If the editor nods 'yes,' it is worth from one to five thousand dollars depending on who the writer is and how big the demand for him. And if he says 'No, thanks,' the income-tax people will let the writer deduct the market value of twenty sheets of used foolscap and depreciation on his typewriter, and the manuscript can then be used to light a fire. You can't afford to be wrong.

Short stories and novelettes that get into magazines in the class of mass circulation of the 'Saturday Evening Post,' 'Good Housekeeping,' 'Cosmopolitan,' 'Woman,' 'Woman's Own,' 'Argosy,' or 'John Bull' are counted as successful since if nothing else they have had to meet certain standards which if not always highly literary are at least a guarantee that they can be published in a highly competitive field to divert ordinary people. They have passed editorial tests and hence are original, amusing, instructive, entertaining and readable. Working as a professional writer with a reasonable understanding of my medium I have long been aware that there are often more interesting and exciting things

about a story than meets the eye, and among these is the story of the story, for there always is one connected with every effort.

Not that I hold with the frequently perpetrated theatrical cliché that the writer per se is a romantic and fascinating fellow. His delineation on the stage, hacking away at a portable in the middle of an expensive indoor set somewhere on Long Island, or Chelsea, pausing for thinks, ruffling his fingers through his hair, making moues and lighting endless cigarettes, always makes me a little ill. Nothing is quite so static and unromantic as a chap sitting at a typewriter. And paradoxically nothing is to me quite as exciting and fabulous as the preparation of a story or the realisation of the hundreds of kaleidoscopic flashes of the human mind, both conscious and subconscious, not to mention bits and pieces of the liver and lights of the writer that go into it.

For there is no creative product that so exposes the past life, the background, the adjustment or lack of adjustment to life, the fears and foibles, the failings and the strivings of the human being behind it as does writing. Music is an emotional abstract, painting and sculpture in themselves provide few clues to the personality of the artist. But everything a man ever thought or did, or was or hoped to be, will eventually find its way into his copy.

Why does a man write a story? For many reasons: an urge, a bite, a gripe, the need to get something off his chest, the desire to support his family, the hope of expressing something beautiful he feels inside him, the wish to entertain, to be admired, to be famous, to overcome a frustration, to experience vicariously an unfulfilled wish, or just for the pleasure of taking an idea and sending it flashing through the air like a juggler with many silver balls, or the dark satisfaction of pinioning that same idea or thought or human experience and dissecting it to its roots.

'To write beautifully of beautiful things' is enough for any man's ambition, but the ingredients that go into this writing are myriad and fascinating. No matter what the subject, the storehouse of the mind is opened and a million relics of a full life are there from which to select and choose. There are human experiences, memories, dreams from both night and day, fantasies, people real and imagined, places one has seen with the naked eye and places one has hungered for in the spirit, scents, snatches of long-forgotten conversations, old and troublesome emotions one had thought packed away, the memory of a caress, dislikes, hatreds, love and fear, serenity and passion, all waiting to help you in the telling of your tale. Many of these are unrecognised, but sometimes one is able to see through a finished story and know how old and how characteristic are some of the things contained therein.

Even superficially the events gathered behind a story are interesting, the whys and wherefores of the background, the actual experience that touched off the idea, and the means used by the writer to add substance and drama to a happening, an episode, a fantasy, or an idea. The writer appears in many guises throughout his stories, and each of them has a meaning and a reason, some valid relation to his character or person or the kind of human being he is.

This book is intended to be neither an autobiography nor a self-analysis, but rather a glimpse into the workroom of a professional story-teller, somewhat like wandering through the studio of an artist where you will find displayed some of the ingredients he uses in his work scattered about, his paints, palettes and canvases and lay figures, old works and new, good ones and bad.

Such a visit it seems to me might be interesting merely from the point of view of curiosity, it might also be helpful to the beginning writer and perhaps even furnish here and there a hint or a clue as to how to go about confecting saleable fiction. Yet I am offering it only as entertainment. If any of it should prove to be instructive, so much the better then.

Over a period of twenty-five years I have written some hundred and thirty published short stories, novelettes, serials and books, of these short stories I have selected twenty, ten of these written before or during the war and ten between 1945 and today. To each of these I have written a preamble or introduction which, to the best of my recollection is the story behind the story, the background of the idea, the reason for writing it, the design, the method, the things that animated me or for that matter whatever came into my head about it as I looked back. Whether these writings are true or false is debatable. When I write about motivation or emotions connected with the telling of a story which happened years ago I am trying to write not as I feel and think today, but as I hope I remember I then felt and thought. I am most certainly no longer the person I was when I began to write, nor do I write in the same style or upon the same subjects. Some of the things I write about my stories may be exaggeration and some even delusion, but everywhere I think I have managed to embed some kernel of truth.

Half of these preambles were written years ago when first a version of this volume appeared in the United States in 1946. I have now edited them and brought them up to date in the light of being older and, I hope, that much more experienced and knowledgeable.

There is a question I am always asked and it is not confined to the layman. It is 'How do you work?' The content of this question varies from the vacuous probing of the nunny who wants to know whether I have to wait for inspiration and write on both sides of the paper to my colleagues who are as interested in my working hours and methods as I am in theirs.

Briefly then I work from half-past nine in the morning until twelve-thirty or one, break three hours for lunch and rest and return at three-thirty for a two- or three-hour session in the afternoon.

Up to two years ago when an illness suddenly robbed me of the use of my fingers I did all of my work myself at the typewriter, punching out first and second drafts and then sending the corrected and interlined material to my agents for copying. And incidentally the illness which affected the nerves of my hands was occupational. Forty years of bending over a hot typewriter had caused changes in the vertebral column at the neck, pinching the nerves. Faced with a loss of output and recovering in the hospital from an operation to ease the condition I engaged a secretary and in a few months had taught myself to dictate.

The use of my hands was restored, but I am now accustomed to dictating, like it and find that it has increased my output and I can work longer hours. It is also better for my dialogue. Say a silly line to your secretary and even as you are saying it you know it won't do. She may have been trained never to turn a hair no matter what idiocies you might utter, nevertheless you know that she knows the line is a dud and you kill it before it has a chance to go any further.

When I was typewriting my own material physically and was working to develop the plot or an idea of a short story I used to talk to myself on the typewriter, rambling on, setting down thoughts and ideas, praising or cursing them, calling myself names, etc. This had the effect of unblocking myself. Original and valid ideas then would float up from the subconscious and present themselves, and I have solved many a difficult story in this fashion. Today I can achieve the same effect by rambling on to my secretary, dictating my thoughts upon the subject. Pages and pages of these notes are then discarded, but they have accomplished their purpose of letting through the story I really want to tell.

Short stories are initiated from ideas, the tickle of an absurdity, 'Wouldn't it be funny if', an item in the newspaper, a story told by a friend, an emotion or a character one encounters. The difficulty then is to translate this beginning germ or in-

cident into a fully fledged dramatic plot preserving brevity and unity

This is the hardest work of all, for it requires thinking I begin by writing trial synopsis and plot outline, adding, discarding, changing, messing about until a clear line for the beginning, middle and climax begins to emerge, after which a final synopsis is written

Next, this final synopsis is broken up into scenes and so many pages allotted to each scene and transition of the story The average length short story is limited to between five and seven thousand words Five thousand words is about seventeen type-written pages This does not give one much room to turn around and calls for all the tricks of economy, brevity and suggestion which is the nature of the art of short-story writing

When I am satisfied that I can tell my story within the allotted space I spend two or three days writing character sketches, setting down all and everything I know about each of the characters in the story Like the iceberg seven-eighths of this material remains submerged and doesn't show, but the characters have now taken on life for me and I am able to think and speak and act as they might

The above is the work part, then comes the fun part, the writing If the story has been properly constructed, this can be a joy and a delight It is at this time that one makes little discoveries and adds those small touches which are often the contribution a director makes to a moving picture, and which help to bring story and character to life After I have written the first draft I let it cool for two or three days, or a week, by which time I can detect the soft spots and weaknesses The second writing usually eliminates these I write double space and one side of the paper, margin of twenty, two hundred and fifty words to a page This makes for quick and easy reading by the editor.

Final corrections are made with pen and the story forwarded to my agent who has it copied and bound and sent to the publisher for whom he thinks it is best fit

I sit at home chewing my fingernails, waiting to hear if all this effort and planning is to be a success or a failure

These stories represent a span of time from 1933 to 1958, a distance of a quarter of a century Whether the later ones are an improvement over the earlier stories in style and content must be left to you The subject matter changes in the later years as I found myself drawn towards Europe and my outlook tended to become more European and less carpentered to the American

market, an outlook which, incidentally, began to bring me rejections from American magazines which heretofore had been happy to publish my work

There are two ways of reading this book, for I hope either enjoyment or instruction, and I don't know which to recommend, whether I should suggest that you read first the preambles to these stories and then the stories, or first read the story and then afterwards return to the little pieces in front which give the inside story

Perhaps the second is more to be recommended since the story will have had its effect, if any, and you will then perhaps find it interesting to find how some of these effects were achieved and how the whole business came into being. However, should you not be able to resist reading the preamble first, or generally prefer it that way, I promise you that none of them 'give away' or reveal the point so as to spoil the story that follows

In selecting stories for this, the British, edition of this book I have omitted several of my favourite stories which appear in the American edition as being somewhat too American in subject matter, baseball, etc., to appeal to British readers and have substituted tales of more international flavour

Herewith then some examples

McKabe

.....

MCKABE is the first fiction story I ever sold to a 'slick' magazine, the same being the 'Saturday Evening Post' which had been my goal ever since I started writing. The publication date I note was August 12, 1933, at which time I was thirty-six years old and I should say that I had been seriously attempting to crash the portals of this magazine for some fifteen years.

The fulfilment of this ambition was not at all as I had imagined it down through the years, namely the submission of the story with the usual stamped, self-addressed return envelope, the suspenseful wait and the arrival of the letter containing a cheque. On the contrary it was quite different and most business-like.

At that time I was Sports Editor of the tabloid New York 'Daily News'. I had sold articles on sports subjects to several of the large national magazines and I had acquired an agent, Mr Harold Ober. I went to him with my idea and he arranged an appointment the following week with Mr Thomas Costain, then a 'Post' Editor and later himself a novelist. If you are interested in how stories were and are merchandised in the U S A it is the custom of the 'Post' Editors (the magazine is domiciled in Philadelphia) to make weekly shopping trips to New York to visit the offices of the literary agents who at that time showed them their authors' manuscripts or discussed ideas or projects with them. Costain listened to what I had to say and when I had finished simply commented, 'Write it'. This was no commitment or guarantee to buy. The 'Post' never does, but it was an encouragement.

The ingredients of this story are a mixture of a kind of hero worship I gave to the working newspapermen and reporters and editors on the city or editorial side, the factual event of the killing of the notorious gangster, 'Legs Diamond,' and my admiration for Rudyard Kipling and a desire to imitate one of his short stories entitled THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP SEA.

The background for this story, and one other in this volume, is New York's first tabloid newspaper, the 'Daily News,' founded

by the late Captain Joseph Medill Patterson of Chicago The era is the lush period between the two wars

The 'Daily News' at that time was quite different from the mammoth of today boasting the largest circulation in America When I first went to work for it in 1922 it was young, virile, vigorous, rough-neck and rowdy Tough and sensational it was fighting tooth and nail for circulation and a place in the community

I think that newspapers, like people, like everything in nature on earth, are young, grow up, change, age, and pass I am glad that I lived with and was a part of the 'Daily News' during its ebullient youth It was the greatest shop in town in which to work and turned out some of the best newspapermen and women of the era

Behind these people, animating them, supporting them, egging them on, was the then young Captain Joseph Medill Patterson, publisher of the paper, just home from the wars, with a record of socialism and liberalism behind him in Chicago, a man filled with the gusto of living, who had a sense of sparkling mischief without malice, whose understanding of the mass mind of the American public was infallible, and who never lacked the courage to admit when he was wrong. Working for him meant fun and excitement as well as good pay, and most of the men on the other sheets would have given a right arm to become a part of the 'News' organisation

The newspaper as well as the people who worked for it used to fascinate me, and long before I thought of it as background for a series of fictional stories I used to duck away from the sports desk and roam through the other departments, watching, asking questions, getting the foreman or heads of departments to explain their work to me, trying to familiarise myself with the daily miracle that took place before my eyes, the smooth amalgamation of highly differentiated parts of a human and material machine leading to the inevitable climax of going to press on time

I wandered through the darkrooms of the photographer's laboratory, where they could whip you out a print in less than five minutes after the cameraman had come bustling in from the scene of the accident or crime, the photo-engraving department, where pictures were turned into metal cuts to be laid next the type, into the library, where the intricate files were kept, files on the lives and misdeeds of hundreds of thousands of people, down to the composing room, where the chaffering batteries of linotype set the type for the paper and the headlines were autotyped I spent time in the inferno of the stereotype room, where the plates

for the presses were cast, and from time to time when the battery of presses looking like the innards of an ocean liner or a battleship would begin to turn over slowly, commence to roll, and then, picking up speed rise to an earth-shaking crescendo of noise and fury, I would be standing up on the iron balcony, hanging on to the vibrating steel rail, drinking in the sights and the sounds and the smells as the pink papers with their black headlines poured forth from the hopper and were stacked for the delivery room

One of my favourite people on the 'News' was Gene McHugh, night editor, a bush-haired, hollow-eyed genius with ulcers, tough, wise, decent, full of city-savvy and news instinct

The morning of the day before Christmas in 1932 Gene was on the lobster shift, running the paper between the hours of midnight and 8 a.m. His job was to supervise the final edition, which was put to bed at four o'clock in the morning, and prepare the schedules for the day men

Shortly after six o'clock in the morning Gene received a telephone call from our Albany correspondent to the effect that Legs Diamond, notorious bootlegger and gangster, had been mowed down in a hail of machine-gun bullets in an Albany lodging house. It was a clean and sensational scoop, but might just as well have been delivered in Choctaw for all the good it could do either McHugh or the 'News'. Because our run was off for the morning, the linotypers, stereotypers, and pressmen dispersed, and the printing plant shut down, to all practical purposes

This was the problem that faced McHugh. The earliest he could hope to get this temporarily clean beat into the paper was the next day's pink edition, which went to press at six o'clock in the evening. But by that time the afternoon papers would have killed the story

But McHugh was a newspaperman from his toes to his flying thatch, and the fact that he couldn't get this news on to the street in his edition galled him more than his ulcers. He knew it was impossible. And yet a stubborn and invincible spirit surged within him. He went to work

Two hours later he had a paper on the street. It was an odd-looking specimen but it told the news and served it up exclusively. It was one of the really great scoops, beats, or whatever you wish to call it, of the era

There were several of Rudyard Kipling's short stories that were special favourites of mine, and one of these was that epic of man against machinery, *THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP SEA*, which appears

in the volume called *THE DAY'S WORK*, in the authorised edition. If you don't remember it, it will pay you to look it up. It is the story of a little British steamer caught pearl-poaching in the East Indies and brought to bay with a five-inch shell through her engine-room. It deals with her chief engineer, Mr Wardrop, who attempts the impossible, namely to bring order out of the horrible tangle of steel, copper, and iron junk and repair the damage sufficiently to escape.

The analogy between this story and the story of McHugh, Wardrop's problem and McHugh's problem, struck me at once. Here was a chance to try to emulate a writer who was a hero to me and attempt to write a story like that.

Emulate should not be confused with plagiarise. The theme of man against the elements is as old as literature, and that of man against machinery at least as old as machinery. McHugh sang in my heart as Mr Wardrop must have made Kipling's blood course faster. To put it mildly, the two stories and their treatments are entirely different. Rudyard Kipling remains undisputed champion, but I was able to achieve at least one lifelong ambition, and that was to make the 'Saturday Evening Post'.

But it is one thing to be told by the great personage of a 'Post' Editor, 'Write it,' and quite another to do so. I immediately was seized with a most virulent case of 'Post' fever, a disease similar to buck fever which grips hunters the first time they find a deer in their gun sites.

I destroyed page after page, tore up lead after lead. Everything I had ever learned about writing a short story I had forgotten. Here was opportunity beckoning and I was cowering miserably from it.

Eventually the nerves were conquered. After all Mr Costain had liked my story when I told it to him. All I really had to do then was to tell it to the readers the way I imagined it had happened.

After that it wrote itself in three days and I turned it in and a week later heard the news which was to change the pattern of my life.

I pity all who have never known the thrill of 'making' the 'Post,' or similar publication, for the first time. Like the exquisite moment of the first solo flight in an aeroplane it can happen only once, it can never be experienced again and it can never be forgotten. The Messrs E. McHugh, R. Kipling, T. Costain, H. Ober and the 'Saturday Evening Post' are hereby thanked.

As a final footnote to this history of a new start in life, the 'Post' paid me five hundred dollars for the story. Following its publica-

tion I was sued for libel by a printer whose real name I had inadvertently used, though in connection with another character, a bit of sheer aberration on my part but indicating how closely I was working with real characters I won the libel suit, but my lawyer's bill for the successful defence was nine hundred dollars, which left me with a four-hundred-dollar deficit on the deal and the determination to be careful in bestowing names on fictional characters in the future

MCKABE

The city room was nothing but a feeble pulse in the somnolent body of the paper when, a few minutes after six-thirty in the morning, the day before Christmas, the number three telephone on the city desk of the *New York Morning Blade* jangled. The paper had gone to bed hours before, when, at 4 a.m., the last edition had come thundering off the block-long battery of presses. The emergency crews had been released and sent home.

Gene McKabe, lobster-shift editor, looked up from the overnight assignment sheet on which he was working, preparatory to turning it over to the day relief, when and if it should decide to show up. McKabe was a thin, greyish, old-looking little man at thirty-eight, who suffered from stomach ulcers and inferiority. Irritably he flipped the receiver off the hook and prepared to take a story from some tipster that two milk wagons had collided on a slippery street, or that a drunk had fallen down a flight of steps and was lying in the gutter. This was the usual run of news that came to McKabe in the early hours, stories in which he played no great part beyond weighing their importance in reporting them to the day shift for coverage. Well, someone had to take the trick from midnight to morn.

McKabe mumbled 'Desk - McKabe,' into the mouthpiece, with his mind half on his assignment sheet and half on the dull pain that gnawed at his middle at that time of the morning. The *Blade* operator said 'A Mr Giller is calling you from Albany, New York, and wishes you to pay for the call.'

'Oke!' grunted McKabe, and wondered what could be getting their Albany correspondent, a not too alert individual at best, out of bed at that hour of the morning.

'Will you accept the charges?' repeated the operator

'Yes, yes, yes,' said McKabe 'Put him on' He checked off an assignment for one of the day photographers to make some pictures along the Bowery and instinctively glanced around the deserted local room while he waited A Negro janitor was hauling off huge wire baskets laden with paper and trash Two charwomen were on their knees in the aisles between the battery of rewrite desks The art department was empty The big horseshoe-shaped copy desk was untenanted Monk, the lobster-shift office boy, the only other person in the vast room besides himself, had pushed two of the reporters' desks together and was lying atop them with his coat rolled up under his head, his shirt open at the neck, his mouth a gummy cavern, snoozing and snoring in an unlovely manner The long-distance operator said something in a distant, far-off bleat, and the *Blade* operator replied in her singsong 'We are ready with Mr McKabe He is on the li-yen' McKabe heard Giller's voice, at first indistinct and then clear and plain as the operators closed their keys It was shaking and surcharged with excitement He said

'Hello! Hello! Desk? Who is this?'

'Hello, Giller - McKabe What's biting you?'

'Who is it? Mac? Listen, Mac They got Feet Schindler up here a half an hour ago Blew his head off.'

'What?' said McKabe, and glued the receiver more firmly to his ear 'Lemme have that again' Instinctively his eyes leaped to the clock over the desk Six thirty-seven The *Times* and the *Tribune* had shut down at five, the *American* and the *Mirror* a half-hour later But the afternoon papers—

'Listen! Wait,' said Giller, his voice sounding odd with the pressure of excitement 'Hello, Mac? They got Mimi, his girl, too, and Little Hymie and Joe Colonno It's a slaughter'

'Sweet Peter!' said McKabe 'Wait a minute' He called over to the sleeping office boy 'Monk! Hey, Monk!' Then he threw a telephone book at him, which struck him in the chest Monk sat up, bleary-eyed and indignant McKabe bawled at him 'Get on extension 457 and help me check this story'

Monk ambled over to the desk, working his mouth, and picked up pencil, paper, and the receiver from the extension of McKabe's phone on the other side of the desk

'Shoot!' said McKabe, his own pencil poised

'Listen,' said Giller, 'I'm coming home about a hour ago from a little party at my wife's sister's. I'm a little stiff, see?'

'You're not stiff now, are you?' asked McKabe, suddenly suspicious

'Listen,' replied Giller's voice, and its deadly earnestness convinced McKabe 'After what I just seen, nobody could be stiff. So the wife is inside and I'm just putting the car away when the World War busts loose on the other side of town. It's 'way on the other side, but it's so clear and quiet I can hear it. Machine-guns. It takes me a half-hour to find it.'

To himself Monk carefully repeated the address Giller gave, and marked it on his sheet.

'The state troopers were there already. They were all dead.'

'Who was dead—the troopers?'

'No, no! Feet and his doll and all of them. They made a clean get-away.'

'I thought you said they were dead.'

'No, no, no! The mob that done it made the get-away. They drove up in a car, walked up two flights, and machine-gunned 'em. Feet and Mimi and Little Hymie and Joe Colonno must 'a' come up from Kinderhook and took a room in this joint. It's just a rooming house. I guess they were all celebrating Feet's acquittal. They caught 'em cold. There was a lot of busted gin and whisky bottles around that got shot to pieces.'

'How many in the mob?'

'I dunno. They made a clean get-away in a car—'

Monk edited this statement automatically and wrote 'Clean get-away in high-powered car.'

'—but from the slugs that's in the bodies and the walls, there must 'a' been at least four of 'em pumping submachine-guns, and maybe a coupla lookouts. The walls was all shot to pieces, and the lights. Feet and the girl were sitting on the bed when they got it. Joe and Hymie were at the table, drinking. The floor is all blood and plaster out of the wall and ceiling and pieces of glass. They didn't take a chance on Feet getting away this time. Got all that? Is that something? None of the other guys are out here yet. We got an hour's start. Is that something?'

'Yeah,' said McKabe. His eyes went to the clock again. It now showed a quarter to seven. 'That's something, all right. But what the hell good does it do us? We're locked up. The run's off. The crews have all gone home. We're dead. Get it? Feet's been knocked off for the afternoon papers. That's your luck and mine. The devil himself couldn't get out a paper at this hour. I'll rout O'Rary out and fly him up to get some pix. Stay on it. Call me back in an hour.'

There was a pregnant silence from the other end of the telephone.

McKabe hung up the receiver and chewed at his pencil, his

eye on the clock again His face went suddenly ash-coloured and he swore Excitement always made his stomach bad Monk hung up the receiver to his extension and blinked across the desk at McKabe, who sat looking old and shrunken The copy time-clock stamp went 'click' as another minute popped itself into eternity Six forty-seven—the day before Christmas Merry Christmas, Feet Blown to hell Feet, Feet, Feet The name marched through McKabe's skull and trailed behind it black ribbons of headlines The enormousness of the story suddenly struck home Feet Schindler, the headline pet, big-time racketeer, killer, booze and 'dope runner Feet, the much-shot-at, who had survived five murderous attacks and who carried enough slugs in his skinny body to founder him, whose latest escape from death had been a seven-day sensation, and whose acquittal the afternoon before of a charge of hijacking and abduction was still smashed over the face of the extra-final edition of the *Blade* which lay face-up on McKabe's desk It read 'FEET ACQUITTED'

It was wrong It ought to be shrieking 'FEET MURDERED, FEET SLAUGHTERED, FEET BUTCHERED' The date, 'December 24, 1932,' on the logotype made 'FEET ACQUITTED' stale and a lie It was six forty-eight the morning of December 24, and Feet, the king cobra of the muscle and roscoe men, was lying in a welter of plaster and broken glass and his own blood in a cheap rooming house in Albany Yesterday he was acquitted Today he was dead Fresher news! Hotter news! His moll was dead with him, Mimi, the pretty, red-haired *Follies* girl, and Little Hymie and Joe Colonna lying in the same room Six-star, extra-final edition The latest news December 24, 1932 FEET ACQUITTED Acquitted nothing! He was either roasting in hell or standing before the last bar of justice confirming his killings Feet! Feet! Feet!

McKabe looked up at the clock again The corpse of the paper was three minutes colder Six-fifty 'Call the pressroom,' said McKabe 'See if you can raise anybody'

Monk looked at a card stuck under the glass top of the city desk, stuck his pencil butt into the dial face, and spun it around to 346 As he did so, McKabe was dialling 342, the composing room, 3-4-2 Wait Click Ring ring ring ring

The phone in the empty office of the composing-room foreman rang again and again Outside, the vast floor loaded with steel and lead, with the orderly rows of linotype machines set up at one end and the make-up stones with the half-broken forms of the paper resting thereon, was dark, empty deserted The purplish-blue, overhead mercury lamps were out One electric drop-

light that hung over one of the type saws cast deep shadows that reached to the linotypes and darkened the silver-lead pots in which was nothing but cold metal. A single red standing light gleamed over one of the machines and lit up a few of the rows of the keyboards. It had been turned on by the operator to indicate that the machine was out of order.

Three hours earlier, hot type had been dropping from the clacking, chaffering, spinning machines, as line after line of silver-lead was set by the flying fingers of rows of operators. The telephone began to ring in the empty room. This was a 'swing' morning because of the impending holiday. The day shift wouldn't be on until eight. The telephone stopped ringing.

It rang in the pressroom in the empty office of the pressroom foreman, who an hour ago had ordered the presses stripped, seen them washed down and oiled, and gone away. Outside, the great presses that stretched for a full city block lay dark, gleaming, and silent. They looked like the turbines of a gigantic battle cruiser. When they ran at full blast, they made a noise like sheet iron falling down a mountainside. The floor and the steel gallery that ran around them, and the entire building, trembled. Men, oily and grimy, walked the catwalks between and around them. The papers poured from them like chaff from a hopper. Governors spun, rocking beams rocked, levers and pistons moved back and forth in their complicated counterpoint. The paper whirled white through the cylinders and came out grey-black with news and pictures.

Now they lay quiescent, sinister mountains of machinery. The overhead lights gleamed from the polished brass and steel and from the oil on the steel floors to which they were anchored. There was in the vast and seemingly endless pressroom no motion, no sound but the regular ring-stop-ring of a telephone.

McKabe called a Garden City number and routed O'Rary, the flying photographer, out of bed, told him what had happened and ordered him to Albany to make pictures, and then telephoned to a reporter to meet O'Rary at Roosevelt Field and fly up with him to Albany and get on the story. The excitement bell in the A P and U P ticker room went. 'Ding ding ding Ding-ding-ding-ding-ding' Monk pricked up his ears and McKabe motioned him with his head in the direction of the room. When he came back, he had a narrow slip of white paper in his fingers — an A P flash.

It read.

6 52 A M FLASH FEET SCHINDLER REPORTED SLAIN IN ALBANY
EDITORS FOR YOUR INFORMATION MORE LATER ON VERIFICATION

McKabe swore helplessly Now it was out Feet Schindler reported slam More on verification! Reported nothing He was an hour, two hours ahead of them all He had the story. He had it in his mind's eye His physical eye looked at the time again It was five minutes to seven He saw again the picture that Giller had drawn for him of that dreadful room in Albany He could get it down on paper—short, pithy, exciting sentences But it couldn't be cast into type It couldn't be got on to the presses He had a moment of complete madness when he contemplated making twenty carbon copies of the story and getting it out on the street—getting something out on the street Everybody would want to know Everybody ought to know Extra! Extra! Feet Schindler slam Here's the story by Gene McKabe, on a piece of copy paper. Read it and pass it along to your neighbour

The same Associated Press flash that lay before him was in the offices of the *Times*, and the *Tribune*, the *American*, the *Standard*, *News-Beacon*, *Chronicle*, and *Enquirer* All the lobster-trick editors on the morning sheets were fingering the same slip of paper and cursing their inability to get the news on to the street Lobster-trick editors! Forgotten newspapermen like himself who worked the shift from midnight to dawn Not the most brilliant editors in the world, but good sound news men who knew what to do in case of fire, flood, or quake Well, none of them could perform miracles and bring a corpse to life With a good deal of scrambling, the day forces could get a morning paper out by seven o'clock that night, twelve hours later

Not so the afternoon papers, due on the streets at ten-thirty in the morning With a sickening sensation McKabe visioned the excitement and the activity in the offices of the *News-Beacon*, the liveliest of the afternoon sheets—editors on telephones to Albany, reporters piling into plane and car and heading north to run down the tip, rewrite men fingering through the clips on the dead Schindler, preparing a biographical sketch of his career, copy pouring into the composing rooms Time, time, time—fleeing seconds and minutes They would try to move their press time up, rout out their Albany man, locate the death house, interview the state troopers Artists would be drawing diagrams and artists' conceptions of the slaying The vast news-reporting resources of the Associated and United Press were hot on the trail by this time It wouldn't be long before the bell in the ticker room would ring again, and the first details of the sensational slaughter would be clacked out on the automatic printers And in the meantime the radio might kill the story

McKabe jumped to his feet 'Watch those phones,' he said to

Monk 'I'll be back' He ran over to the elevator and caught it as the porter dragged a load of wastepaper aboard

'Pressroom,' he said

The operator looked at McKabe curiously 'Gallery?'

'Floor,' said McKabe His heart was banging against his chest His stomach was sore In his throat was a curious, nervous, excited feeling He swallowed several times

The elevator door slid back and McKabe half ran through the door as though to catch the miracle he hoped he would find before it vanished - rolling presses, pressmen, fly-boys - life and activity But the batteries lay there glistening, quiet, and oppressive There was no one on the floor The catwalks of steel were empty The massiveness of this cold, silent machinery laid hold of McKabe's heart and made him feel the way he felt when he contemplated high mountains - alone, insignificant, helpless. Mountains made men want to scale them These cold, hard, motionless ranges of steel made a stubborn anger well up in McKabe's heart and throat and brought tears of rage to his eyes

He stood, a pygmy, on the steel floor, a little, thin man with bushy hair, now half iron-grey, eyes sunk into hollows, unshaven, sloppy-looking, his tie pulled down from his shirt, his waistcoat flapping unbuttoned, pockets bulging with pencils, shaking his fist at the dead presses and then pounding his forehead with the heel of his hand Men had made these machines, but they wouldn't run without men He, McKabe, willed them desperately to run, and not a gear, not a cog, not a lever could move He began to curse them His voice came clattering back to him from the high vault two storeys above His eye caught the ever-present clock - seven-three Then his ears caught a scraping noise halfway down the room If it were only one pressman - one of anyone who knew what handles to pull, what buttons to push to make those giants roll again - somehow McKabe knew he might do the rest He ran down that catwalk between the two rows of presses like a sprinter, his feet rapping sharply on the floor

It was another porter, plunking trash into his wire basket and dragging it along the floor

'Hey!' shouted McKabe 'You!'

The porter, a Swede, looked at him curiously 'Vat?' he said

'Ah, hell,' said McKabe 'Nobody here?'

'Nah,' replied the Swede. 'Dey close up, hour ago'

'You don't understand anything about' - nodding his head at the presses - 'these?' McKabe hoped vaguely that the man might be an apprentice or an ex-pressman filling in to keep working

'Haw, haw!' laughed the Swede 'I keep away from dem Vat you looking for - pressmen?'

'My God, yes,' said McKabe 'Do you know where any are? Maybe there's a couple still washing up'

The Swede shook his head 'Propley you find a coople across the street'

McKabe grabbed the porter's arm 'Across the street? The speakeasy?'

'If dey get drunk enough, dey stay there sometimes'

'Wait a minute,' said McKabe 'What day is this?' He knew, but he couldn't bring it into his mind

'Huh?' said the Swede, and looked at him Then he fished into his wire basket and pulled out a paper The black headline on it hit McKabe like a physical blow It read 'FEET ACQUITTED' The Swede looked at the date line 'December 24, 1932' - and said 'You haff a coople drinks already? Tomorrow iss Christmas'

December 24 The day before Christmas - the day the cashier paid the Christmas bonus Some of the crew might hang around and wait - hang around in the neighbouring speakeasies

'O K, O K, O K! Thanks!' said McKabe He was already running down to the end of the room He ran to the elevator, pressed the button, and then, without waiting, pushed through the door to the iron stairs that led to the street

A twinge of pain caught him and stopped him, weak and gasping It passed. Two steps at a time, he ran down two flights to the bottom and out into the street

McKabe crossed the street to the speakeasy and never felt the cold or the slight morning drizzle He burst through the ground-glass door so precipitately that the bartender stopped wiping glasses and rather casually dropped his right hand down below the bar, but restored it when he saw who it was, and said 'Hello, Mac Merry Christmas Don't come in quite so fast, old boy'

Larkin, the sub-foreman of the pressroom, Farley, an old-time pressman, and a man whom McKabe did not know were sitting around one of the wooden tables drinking Scotch highballs and eating cheese sandwiches They were all drunk McKabe paused, looking as though he had seen the Angel Gabriel, mopped his brow, and said 'Sweet Peter, I'm glad to see you fellows'

The three looked at McKabe owlishly and a little resentfully, until Larkin recognised him and said 'Oh, h'lo, Mac, ol' Mac, ol' Mac Merry Christmas Will ya have a li'l drink?'

McKabe shook his head, made the usual gesture towards his stomach, said 'I can't drink likker It murders me Listen, are all you pressmen?'

Larkin shook his head 'Billers here'—nodding towards the stranger—'is a sub-make-up He jus' come on from Milwaukee Wife's cousin . Billers, shake han's with Mizzter McKabe.'

'Can you set type?' said McKabe eagerly, without acknowledging the introduction

Billers nodded his head solemnly that he could, but said 'I ain't in a long time, I'm a make-up'

'Listen, you birds,' said McKabe, his voice choking with excitement 'I want you to come on back with me and help me get a paper out Feet Schindler—'

Larkin interrupted indignantly 'What the heck are you talking about? 'S shut down Closed up Can't get no paper out Siddown and have a drink'

'No, no! Listen, fellers,' said McKabe earnestly, his sunken eyes wide and pleading, and dropped into the vacant chair at the table 'Listen, there's a whale of a story We got it They knocked off Feet Schindler and his doll and everybody Listen, we could beat the afternoon papers out—'

'Ah, forget it, Mac, and have a drink,' said Larkin 'You can't get a paper out'

'The hell I can't,' said McKabe, blazing suddenly and banging the table so that a slab of cheese jumped the dish 'If you two can plate up a press, Billers can set the story'

Larkin wiped his mouth with the back of his hand 'And who's gonna cast the new plates? Ya gonna have a new One and Three, ain'tcha? Ya can't get a edition out with a rubber stamp Have a drink and forget about it'

'Stereotypers!' said McKabe 'Aren't there any stereotypers in here?'

Farley peered intently around the empty room and said 'No'

McKabe screwed his eyes shut and ran his fingers through his hair Suddenly he pointed a bony finger at Larkin 'What's that joint where the stereotypers usually hang out?'

'It's just over on Second Avenue, but there won't be anybody there now Most of the boys went up to Ed's house to play pinochle Forget it, Mac'

McKabe was up out of the chair 'Listen, will you fellers stay here a minute till I get back?'

Larkin said 'You're damn right we'll stay here We're gonna stay here till tomorrow morning We're—'

McKabe was already heading for the door He heard Billers say 'Who is that screwball?' as he went through the door He started for Second Avenue and the speakeasy frequented by some of the stereotypers and compositors

The place was deserted except for the sleepy-eyed bartender, who was hanging up his apron. He didn't bother to turn around when he heard McKabe's footsteps, but merely said

'Closing up'

'No, no. I don't want a drink,' said McKabe. 'Are any of the stereotypers here?'

'Naw. They been and gone. If you'd come a minute sooner, Otto was here. You know Otto? He just left.'

'Which way did he go?' McKabe knew fat Otto Schommers, who worked in the foundry, making the mats from which the plates were cast. The bartender shrugged his shoulders. McKabe ran out into the street. It was deserted. Helpless, he ran a few steps first north, then south, stopped and swore bitterly. Then, two blocks away on Thirty-ninth Street, he saw a squat, solitary figure standing on the corner beneath the elevated. A trolley car was coming up the avenue, northbound. McKabe broke into a run for the figure, shouting, 'Otto! Hey, Otto! Otto Schommers! Hey, Otto! Otto, wait!' He didn't even know if it was Otto. Or if he had seen or heard him. The trolley clattered closer. McKabe gave one more yell. 'Otto! Hey, Otto!' The car blotted him from sight. McKabe ran on. The trolley moved away. The squat figure was still there. It was Otto.

'Otto!' McKabe reached him and caught him by the arm. 'Otto! Where you going?'

Otto paused. 'Home. Where you think? You make me miss my car.'

'Listen,' said McKabe between gasps. 'Will ya come back and cast a couple of plates? Hell of a story. Wanna get a paper out Gotta. Will ya, Otto?'

Otto gazed at McKabe placidly. 'Sure,' he said. 'It's O K with me. I'll cast 'em. If I ain't too drunk. Anything you say.'

McKabe looked at Otto's fat and pudgy face. 'Otto, I could kiss you. We'll pick up Larkin, Farley, and Billers on the way.' He put his arm around fat Otto's shoulder and they turned back down the street.

It was seven twenty-four when McKabe shepherded his group through the plant door. The block-long double battery of giant presses no longer filled McKabe with quite the same awe. He no longer stood so terribly alone before them. Two of these men with him could master them.

Larkin took his handkerchief from his lips and said. 'Now just what is it you want us to do, ol' boy, ol' boy?'

'Plate up,' said McKabe. 'Get the plates back on again. I'll write the story.' Billers can set it and make it up. We'll send down a

new page 1 and 3 Otto says he can make the mats and cast them alone You get those plates on the cylinders, I'll do the rest.'

'Plate up with what?' asked Larkin with sarcasm 'I told you the paper was dead The plates have been destroyed Come on back and forget about it The plates have been melted up already. We don't keep 'em You can't do a miracle, even if it is Christmas, Mac I could 'a' told you that'

McKabe said 'Oh, God,' and clung to the handrail of number ten press Farley began picking his teeth Billers did likewise Otto looked fat and placid

'All right! All right! That won't stop me We'll cast 'em all over again' McKabe shouted it and then turned to Otto 'Whaddya say, Otto? Cast the whole damn thing over again except 1 and 3'

Otto shrugged his shoulders 'It's O K with me Anything you say I'll cast a million of 'em It don't mean nothing in my life I get time and a half I hope the mats is all right'

McKabe clutched his head 'The mats Holy jumping - Otto, you look I can't' Otto waddled placidly off in the direction of the stereotype foundry McKabe pounded his skull with the heel of his hand again His stomach was afire 'If those' - he broke into profanity again - 'mats aren't there -'

'You'll have the mats remade out of forms that is broke up,' sneered Larkin 'You're off your nut'

McKabe didn't hear him, or if he did, he gave no sign.

They stood around, silent and gloomy, until Otto came waddling back down the iron walk His features were as expressionless and placid as ever It was impossible to tell whether he had good news or bad All four stared at him

'Well?' It was McKabe who spoke

'Yeah, the mats is there' Otto scratched his head 'You want I should begin casting? It takes some time'

McKabe looked up at the pressroom clock It was seven thirty-one 'How long?'

'I dunno Maybe a hour I gotta work alone'

'Can't Larkin and Farley help you?'

'We're pressmen, not stereotypers,' said Larkin 'You get us the plates, we'll slap 'em on It'll take Otto a couple hours to cast up all them plates for a thirty-six-page paper The afternoon papers will be on the street The *News-Beacon* goes in at half-past ten Why don't you forget about it? What the hell is this hot story, anyway, that can't wait until tomorrow?'

'Come on,' said McKabe He steadied himself on Otto's shoulder and the five went off to the foundry

Otto divested himself of his coat, vest, tie, and shirt and worked

naked from the waist up. He threw a switch and the foundry became bathed in blue mercury light. Larkin and Billers and Farley looked bilious, and Otto like a fat imp from inferno. He looked at the temperature of the molten metal in the casting machine, pressed on a button, and the huge pile of pipes, cylinders, cauldrons, beams, and dials came to life and hissed and groaned and clanked, shuddering. Otto cast a blank test plate to try out the machine and the metal, picked it off the revolving casting cylinder with hands clad in asbestos gloves, and shoved it back into the melting pot again. He worked with a sure, deliberate leisureliness that soothed rather than aggravated McKabe. The dead giant was stirring—the first faint flutter McKabe watched Otto. From a pile in one corner of the foundry Otto took a brown mat, shaped like a half cylinder, dimpled and corrugated with type impressions, baked stiff and hard like a biscuit. Otto ran his fingers deftly over the inside surface. 'Page 2,' he said, and slipped it into the casting cylinder, made an adjustment, locked it into place, and pressed a yellow button. The machine hissed and roared. Metal parts moved against one another noisily.

The cylinder made a half turn, and to its outside clung the curved metal plate with the negative type faces on the outside. Otto plucked it off, steaming hot, and carried it to the shaver and pulled the lever. Steel knives pared little curls of silver from the inside. The plate slid on down over the cooler. Jets of oil and water shot up into the inside.

'Come on, you punks, and grab it,' said Otto. 'What you want me to do—put it on the presses for you? I'm a stereotyper, not a pressman.'

Larkin laughed. 'Stick it on the conveyor,' he said. 'We'll catch it outside.' He and Farley turned and walked out. Otto set the plate on the moving rollers that led to the pressroom, and the thing travelled solemnly out through a hole in the steel wall into the pressroom. A tremendous excitement took hold of McKabe. The moving plate seemed to release him from a stupor into which pain and discouragement seemed to have sent him. Time, seven forty-three. 'At-a-boy, Otto!' he shouted. 'I'll get the story out as quick as I can! Come on, Billers!'

They went upstairs in the freight elevator, stopped at the sixth floor, the composing room, where McKabe unloaded Billers. He had an uneasy feeling that all might not be well there, but after his victory in the pressroom, he lacked the courage momentarily to investigate personally.

'Go on,' he said to Billers. 'Get familiar with the place. I'll rush

the copy down in short takes The 36-point machines are over in that far corner The 72 and 96 is hand-set' It was seven forty-four by the composing-room clock

'O K,' said Billers, 'take your time I can't start until eight anyway'

The elevator door started to close 'What?' screamed McKabe 'You heard me,' said Billers 'Union rules Keep your shirt on'

The elevator door shut McKabe cursed Billers so that the elevator man turned and stared at him and then had to remind him that they were at the seventh floor McKabe staggered out of the elevator and over to the city desk It seemed to him that he had been gone for hours He expected to see it piled high with A P and U P copy, but it wasn't The press associations were evidently having trouble on the story Monk was asleep at the desk, his head buried in his arms McKabe shook him until he awoke, blinking stupidly

'Come on Get on the job Hustle out to the library and get me all cuts on Feet Schindler - the big ones'

Monk dragged his leaden feet McKabe yelled 'I said hustle!' and threw another telephone book at him Monk ducked and kept on going at no faster speed McKabe inserted a sheet of paper in the swinging typewriter at the city desk and from sheer force of habit typed in the upper left-hand corner 'Schindler slaying, McKabe REW Giller', wrote 'By Eugene McKabe' in the centre of the page, and then exed it out He was an editor and had no authority for a by-line He then wrote.

*Silent night, Holy night The world sleeps
Only the Holy Christ child keeps lonely vigil*

The carillons of St Anthony's on the hill in Albany, New York, rang out the old hymn in the cold, clear dawn before Christmas and then were drowned out by the roar of four submachine-guns exploding simultaneously in the dingy top-floor room of a cheap boarding-house at—

McKabe checked his notes to make sure of the address

The slugs that poured from the flaming cannons obliterated Feet Schindler, the king cobra of the racket men, tore his girl, Mimi Fredericks, to shreds, and blew the life out of two of his henchmen, Little Hymie and Joe Colonna, in the greatest underworld slaughter since the St Valentine's massacre in Chicago

McKabe stopped and read it over and liked it It was a good lead He knew that if old Bill Waters, chief of the copy desk, were in the slot, he would probably cut out the stuff about the

Christmas hymn and the carillons But he wasn't McKabe was rewrite, copy desk, and editor in one His head drooped and he braced himself on the typewriter, and then realised that the telephone on the city desk was ringing again It shocked McKabe to consciousness again He got the receiver off the hook and to his ear, and was surprised to hear his own voice saying somewhere inside his head. 'Desk - McKabe'

The voice at the other end said. 'Hello Hello That you, McKabe? This is Billers, down in the composing room Listen, you can't set no type here The machines is all cold'

'What? What the hell are you talking about?'

'I said This is Billers, in the composing room The lead in the pots is all cold You can't set no type here'

McKabe shouted into the telephone 'I'll be down!' and hung up Wrath cleared his head Not set type? Not get that paper out? He would go down and beat Billers to a mush He got up and made for the stairs He saw Monk issuing from the library and called to him 'Bring 'em down to the composing room, and bring that copy out of my typewriter' He half fell down the flight of steps and burst into the composing room, a dishevelled madman, frightened the wits out of Billers, who was sitting on a make-up stone reading the paper and smoking a home-rolled cigarette

'Now, what the hell is this?' gasped McKabe

Billers nodded his head towards the silent rows of linotype machines

'Them lead pots is cold You can't set no type'

'Well, heat 'em up!' snarled McKabe

Billers spat into a type rack 'Take you two hours,' he said

'The hell it will! Stoke 'em up Force 'em!'

'Can't Gotta bring it up gradual Else the lead won't set Them machines is cold Here, come over here and take a look'

He and McKabe went over to the first of the linotype machines Billers rubbed some oil and grease from the face of a small dial on the side The needle registered two hundred and ten degrees

'How much should it be?'

'Between six hundred and six-fifty Take you two hours You gotta bring them up gradual or you can't set no type Might take a chance in a hour and a half Don't figure it no use trying'

McKabe looked helplessly up and down the rows of dead machines with their white keyboards grinning like mocking ivory teeth A few hours ago they were hot Men were sitting at them and sending the brass letter casts tinkling into the casting racks, moulding the bars of type, line after line A few hours ago—

McKabe grasped at the thought 'Wait a minute,' he said 'Maybe they weren't all shut off at the same time Maybe some or one worked later than others We could bring that up Come on.'

Billers came reluctantly, saying 'They're cold, I tell you' They went down the first line, scanning the temperature dials One of them was up to two hundred and seventy The second row of machines was stone-cold McKabe was moving ahead of Billers He had learned to read the dials At the fourth machine in the last row he let out a whoop

'Hey, Billers, four hundred and fifty degrees'

'It'll take you an hour'

'Make it in a half'

'Takin' a chance she won't flow'

'I'll take it Boost her Pour it to her'

Billers looked at the machine 'That's 14-point Vogue That's an advertising type You can't use that' He saw the look in McKabe's eye and hurriedly pressed a switch There was a low hum from the machine Billers looked at an indicator, adjusted something, and shrugged his shoulders 'It's O K with me Only we don't do things like that in Milwaukee I'll set it in 36-point Old English, if you say'

'You're damn right you will What are we going to do about inside heads?'

'Nothin', said Billers 'Them machines is all damn near froze. You got hand type, ain't you?'

'Yeah, 72 and 96 We'll smack the word SLAUGHTERED across page 1. Maybe we've got some 120-point Come on, let's take a look and see what's in the pup'

They went over to the corner of the room where the Sunday predate edition lay on the make-up stones, locked in the forms. McKabe's practised eye skimmed over the reverse type BROKER IN LOVE-CULT TRAP KISS SLAYER TO BE EXECUTED THIS WEEK. GOVERNOR ILL AT ALBANY WIFE SUES RICH MATE CHARGES BLONDE IN HIDE-OUT TALE OF KENTUCKY VENGEANCE CITY SLUMS BREED GANGSTERS BABE RUTH NOT MURDEROUS HITTER OF YORE The Sunday-feature headlines ranged from 36-point Bodoni to 48-point Chelt and Century McKabe whipped out a pencil and began to scribble on the back of an envelope Finally he handed it to Billers It read 'TRAP GANGSTER AT ALBANY HIDE-OUT - EXECUTED IN MURDEROUS VENGEANCE'

'Here,' said, 'fix that up She'll go in two lines of three-column.' Billers looked at it stupidly 'The machine is cold——' he began

'Dig it out of the pup and saw it up!' howled McKabe 'It's all

in there What the hell kind of printers do they have these days? Here, pick out that BROKER IN LOVE-CULT TRAP, and saw off the TRAP Get it?

Billers mumbled something about Milwaukee, unlocked the form, lifted the line out, and took it over to the saw McKabe teetered back to the make-up desk, where Monk waited with the cuts

'Gimme,' he said He spread the metal likenesses of the dead gangster out before him on the desk There was a big three-column cut of Feet's head with a cigarette drooping from the weak mouth He wished it were five columns There was another three-column full-length of Feet and his girl Mimi Three and three were six—one column too many Across the bottom of page 1 of the edition was a five-column cut showing Feet and Mimi and Little Hymie and Joe Colunno in the courtroom at Kinderhook It was too deep, however From the other end of the room came the ring and whine of the metal saw as Billers cut through the headlines 'Wee-e-e-e-ow! Wee-e-e-e-e-ow!' McKabe held the cuts stupidly in his hand for a moment while a spasm of pain swept over him 'Wee-e-e-e-ow!' McKabe came to life again, fighting the pain down, ripped open the desk drawer, and took out a large white sheet the size of the front page, criss-crossed with red lines into squares and marked 'Dummy—Page 1' He laid the three cuts on the sheet and with a pencil and rule marked off the overshoot on each He cut Feet out of the deep three-column, leaving Mimi in two-column size, with a few pieces of Feet on the border, and laughed at the idea of Feet being dismembered again He cut the legs off all of them on the five-column courtroom scene. Then he hobbled down to Billers

'I can't find MURDEROUS,' said Billers

'On page 34, Sports,' snapped McKabe 'Never mind that a second Crop these cuts for me where I got 'em marked Saw 'em off Step on it' •

'R-r-r-r-ring! Wee-e-e-e-ow!' McKabe caught 'Schindler Separated from His Sweetheart' as the saw bit through, and fired the piece into a nearby hellbox Billers cropped the other one

'That's page 1,' said McKabe grimly

'Ain't you gonna have nothing tells who they are—whataya call 'em—captions? Or anything?' asked Billers

'Hell with the captions,' said McKabe 'Everybody knows who they are When I smack that line SLAUGHTERED across the top of the page, they'll get it Get these lines sawed up'

McKabe returned to the desk He dared not exult It was too

soon If the lead didn't heat up, if something went wrong with the casting or the presses — two men, and both drunk, to plate up — But in his ears already rang the cry of the newsboys 'Extra! Extra! Special Extra!' A sudden panic laid hold of him. What newsboys? Where would he get them? What good was a newspaper on the pressroom floor? He grabbed the telephone on the make-up desk

'Hello, honey — McKabe Listen, get me Jim Dixey, the circulation manager, at his home Hurry it' He heard her dial the call A man's voice answered the telephone sleepily

'Hello, Jim This is McKabe Are you awake? Get me now Hell of a story Feet Schindler and his mob knocked off in Albany I'm gonna get a paper out and——'

'Wait a minute — wait a minute Who is this?'

'McKabe I——'

'What's the matter? You drunk, McKabe? What time is it? You can't get a paper out now Why the hell didn't you call me earlier?'

'Listen, you dumb Irish——' raged McKabe 'Did you hear me tell you I was going to get a paper out? You and every other dumb so-and-so have been telling me I can't for the last hour I'm getting it out, I tell you — getting it out!' His voice rose hysterically

There was a silence from the other end of the wire Then 'At-a-boy, Mac How soon you going to be running?'

McKabe looked up at the clock It was twenty-one minutes past eight 'Half an hour with any luck, three-quarters maybe sooner The afternoon papers can't move up more than forty minutes'

'You gimme the papers I'll get 'em around'

McKabe was suddenly suspicious 'You ain't humouring me, are you? I tell you I ain't drunk — I'm——'

'Listen,' said Dixey 'If you're drunk or kidding me, when I get there I'll beat your head off Go ahead, get her rolling'

Get her rolling Rolling, rolling, rolling — those dumb, immovable, lethargic giants below 'Billers! Billers!' bawled McKabe 'Come on down here! We got to get her rolling!'

Billers came strolling until McKabe bawled 'Move!' at him Then he shuffled They went over to the linotype machine The lead in the pot was a liquid, glistening silver The dial read six hundred and ten degrees Billers sat down at the keyboard, shrugged his shoulders, and said 'I don't think she'll be any good It come up too fast' Then he ran his fingers over the keys lightly The type casts tinkled musically into the rack McKabe leaned over to the casing to read the line 'Now is the time for

all good men to come to the aid—' Billers stepped on the pedal, the machine hissed and clacked, chattered, and then delivered the silvery bar of type McKabe pounced on it. It was so hot it burned the ends of his fingers, but he held it. Billers scrutinised it. The type face was a little pock-marked, but legible.

'Let's go!' shouted McKabe.

'O K,' said Billers. 'You got the copy?'

'Sweet Peter!' said McKabe. 'The copy! Here, I'll dictate it.'

'Dictate it? You mean, tell me as you go along? I never done that in Milwaukee.'

'You'll do it here. Set it in two columns. You ready? I'll go slow.' He remembered every word of his lead. 'Silent night, Holy night—' What he hadn't been able to write upstairs through fear and exhaustion, he now told to the printer at the machine. They were a mad pair—this McKabe, gaunter and greyer than ever, his eyes nearly disappearing in the shady caverns of the sockets, his chair dishevelled, his lips pulled away from tobacco-stained teeth, seated on a stool, doubled over, telling in short, bitten-off sentences the story of the shambles in Albany, and Billers, the nondescript printer, a big, scraggly man with a large, expressionless face running pudgy fingers delicately over the hair-trigger keys, unemotional and uninterested.

Then followed a period that to McKabe was the blackest—the make-up. Billers had resolved himself into a slow-motion picture. He refused to be hurried. He was that most dreaded of make-up men—an old maid at the stone. He puttered, he fussed, he straightened, he measured, he went on long expeditions down to the end of the composing room for rules and dashes. Often when on the make-up trick, McKabe would dream a nightmare in which the edition was an hour late and he stood in front of an empty page while printers wandered about and did nothing to fill it. All make-up editors are subject to the same dream, which wakes them in a chilly-sweat, reaching for their watches to see if it is really past edition time.

Billers was the dream come true. McKabe pleaded, argued, bullied, screamed, raged, begged. Billers moved unhurried. Against his lethargic movements the hands of the clock spun around the dial. Seventeen minutes to nine, sixteen minutes to nine, fifteen minutes to nine, fourteen, thirteen. What if by some miracle an afternoon paper had managed to get on the street with his story?

'What you want to do with this divorce story? We need more room,' Billers would ask.

'Yank it out Get it out of there Come on, Billers, for God's sake, hurry a little'

'You can't throw it out without you break up page 4 It jumps to page 4'

'I know it does! The hell with it!'

'You gonna let the jump ride without what goes ahead?'

'Yes Yes Yes!' Once Billers had slid his make-up rule into his pocket and said 'I don't got to let you talk to me like that I don't work here anyway I quit'

McKabe practically went down on his knees to him The composing room was new to Billers and he had to look for everything he needed The inside drop heads that McKabe had taken from the pup had to be resawed to fit Five minutes were wasted looking for the 120-point type for page 1 Once the half-crazed McKabe picked up a paragraph of type and jammed it in the page, and Billers quit again, and meant it

'You touched type,' he said flatly 'I quit That's against the union'

McKabe chased him, a heavy leather type-levelling mallet in his hand Frightened, Billers came back At five minutes after nine the two pages were finally locked up, page 3 a solid mass of black display type with crazy, odd-sized headlines, no two words in the same type, page 1, sawed-off, captionless cuts beneath the one startling word Otto poked his round, sweating face through the composing-room door

McKabe greeted him eagerly 'O K, Otto Just locked 'em up All set, down below?'

Otto shook his head 'I didn't dare tell you,' he said, 'but Larkin and Farley said what was the use and was gonna go home, unless I come right up and told you Page 20 is lost We can't find the mat.'

McKabe only nodded his head 'O K, Otto Shove these two pages through Get going!'

'But whatta you going to do about page 20? The mat's gone'

McKabe laughed loudly 'Go in without it' It's only the editorial page Do you think you're gonna stop me now?'

'But you gotta have a plate, Mac'

'All right, cast a blank one Cast page 18 twice Cast the calendar Cast anything'

'It's gonna look funny'

'Hah!' exploded McKabe 'If you want to see something funny, wait till you see these two pages But it's a paper, Otto! Shove it through!'

McKabe and Billers went over to the steam table and watched Otto lay the composition mat over the form, cover it with a

blanket, and send it humming through the steel rollers, which exerted two tons of pressure and stamped the impressions of the reverse type into a positive on the mat. Otto started to dump the mats down the chute to the foundry, but McKabe stopped him.

'Don't do that! Something might happen to them. We'll carry them down.'

Otto shrugged his shoulders. They rang for the elevator. While they waited for it, McKabe was sick. Billers held him up and said, 'Why don't ya take it easy now and lie down?'

'Stop it, will ya?' said McKabe when he could talk again. 'She ain't rollin' yet.'

It was seven minutes after nine by the foundry clock. Under the blue mercury lights McKabe looked like a corpse. He held on to a steel table while Otto methodically sent the two precious mats through the mat-former, which shaped them into half-cylinders, oiled them, and then dried them on the gas-heated scorcher, which turned them out looking like well-done waffles. He put them through the automatic plater. The hot lead hissed into the cylinders. The machine chattered. Six minutes to a plate. Nineteen minutes after nine McKabe clung motionless to his support, his deep-sunk eyes following every move Otto made. How much had those afternoon rags been able to move up their edition time?

'You got any choice what page you want to duplicate?' Otto asked. He had to ask twice before McKabe heard him. He shook his head. Otto selected one at random.

'Page 18. Moider mystery,' he said. 'They can read it twice.' He slipped it into the automatic moulder and then stuck his head down by the door through which the plates travelled and bawled, 'Starter coming!' McKabe pricked up his ears at that, but was too far gone to exult. The pain from his stomach had exhausted the last of his strength. Otto looked at him as he whipped the plate from the cylinder and sent it through the shaver and coofer. He gave it a final inspection and set it on the rollers. It sailed out of the foundry. McKabe followed it with his eyes.

'You don't feel good, do you?' said Otto.

'I'm all right. What can go wrong now?'

'Plenty,' said Otto, 'but maybe your luck will hold out. Want a hand in?'

He went to McKabe and slipped his arm around his shoulder and they hobbled on to the pressroom floor. It was nine thirty-one. Farley was in the bowels of the number-four press, plating up. Larkin stood at the row of red, yellow, and blue buttons.

'You're plenty lucky,' Larkin said. 'Number 4 had paper on her rollers. Me and Farley never could have got the rolls on alone.'

'What's the matter with you?'

'He don't feel very good,' Otto explained.

'Thus is a hell of a looking page,' commented Farley from inside the press. 'What do you want to print a thing like that for?'

The dull remarks in the quiet pressroom brought some strength back to McKabe. 'Roll her!' he shouted. 'Get her rollin'! What the hell are you waiting for? You got your paper! Roll her!'

Larkin shrugged his shoulders and pushed a red button. The white light bulbs alongside the press turned to red. A bell rang long and loudly, and as it stopped the sound changed to a low, sweet hum, which grew higher and higher in pitch. The wheels began to turn slowly and smoothly. Countless rocker arms, pistons, tappets, and levers went through their appointed motions. The sheets of paper, wide, flat, and white, stretched over the rollers and spindles, began to travel to their common meeting-place, dead white until they reached the turning cylinders, passed over them, and came away grey with print.

McKabe could see the individual pages as they travelled past his eyes. Then the hum grew louder and the press started to clatter as it speeded up. The printed paper turned to grey ribbons that hurled themselves from all directions into the vortex of the machine. The noise became a battery of machine-guns, and then, as the press rolled into high, turned into deep, rolling thunder that flooded McKabe and went to his core like a symphony. He still stood swaying in the centre of the now quivering room. He couldn't even see the astonishing rows or aisles of neatly folded papers that began to climb irresistibly from the mouth of the press, even rows with every fiftieth one turned crooked to mark the count. He didn't see the black headline, **SLAUGHTERED**, or the weak face of the dead Schindler, or Otto and Larkin and Farley and Billers, each with a paper, looking through it and shaking their heads.

He felt and heard rather only the sweet, shaking rumbling of the rolling press, and seemed to hear, too, the orchestration in it, the clattering of the trucks bearing the extra edition to the news-stands, the cries of the newsboys 'Hyah! Special extra!' The rumble of the subways, the chaffering of the submachine-guns that, a few hours ago, had blasted the life out of four people, the scream of the stricken girl, the motors of the vanishing murder cars. All of these he heard in the counterpoint of the whizzing, whirling, spinning, pounding machinery. Papers! Extra! Murder! Exclusive! Paper! Yes, sir. Special extra. Two cents. Only the

Blade's got it Silent night! Holy night! Feet Schindler and
his girl and two bodyguards butchered Noel Noel Only
in the *Blade*! Give it to 'em! Bang-bang-bang-bang! Extra!
Extra!

Dixey, the circulation manager, came into the pressroom, rubbing his hands

'O K, kid You've done it,' he said to McKabe 'The country edition of the *Standard* is up, but it hasn't got a line The *News-Beacon* won't be up for half an hour It's a screwy-looking paper, but it's news'

McKabe began to laugh softly and to himself at first, and then, gamng like the press, louder and louder He dropped to his knees and swayed there, still laughing 'Ha, ha, ha, ha! Ha-a, ha-ha-ha-ha!' His long, bony finger was pointed again, but this time at number four, the giant of steel and copper and iron and brass, the glorious rolling press that was thundering out his story, twenty thousand an hour

'Ya big bum, ya!' he bawled. 'Ya big bum! I made ya roll!'

Flood

FLOOD is one of a series of newspaper stories written as was MCKABE around the fictitious 'Daily Blade' which was really the tabloid New York 'Daily News'. In this series the same set of people appear in different stories, not always playing a leading role, but forming a kind of a cast of characters who eventually became familiar to the readers of the 'Saturday Evening Post'. Two of the principles in these stories were Perry Brown and Rusty McGowan, reporters on the Blade. It was an accepted fact throughout these series that Perry and Rusty were engaged to be married.

FLOOD was one of those stories that keep on happening inside of you all the time they are being written, and that is about the most I seem to be able to remember about it, which is strange because I know the piece meant a lot to me during the time I was writing it and I carried it around the country with me, doing snatches here and there and never quite being able to live outside its atmosphere.

This was a different kind of experience and led to a different kind of story. Many, in fact most, of these newspaper stories were founded upon actual news events, explosions, fires, kidnappings, destructions, and the tales were often based upon true adventures that some of my reporter friends experienced in covering these. But while the flood itself was a natural cataclysm the things that happened to Perry Brown during his abortive covering of the story were things that were taking place somewhere inside of me, or once the story had begun to take shape were dredged up from dark and obscure corners of the subconscious.

A psychiatrist would probably be able to reveal the sources of this story in a jiffy, but I suspect that the revelations would probably be less interesting than the story itself which has remained one of the few favourites of mine of all those I have written. I write 'few' advisedly for usually I find a return to stories I have written a most painful experience.

More interesting, I think, and particularly to the would-be writer or student of writing is the lesson I learnt from FLOOD and one which was to save me a good deal of time and money

At the time I wrote FLOOD I was still suffering from the delusion that to be a writer one had to have experiences, and since I had decided that I didn't wish to be merely a writer of sports stories, a field in which I had some fourteen years of experience, I needed to broaden my field and thus came to the conclusion that the way to broaden it was to be a reporter myself and thus come into daily contact with something spelled 'life' but in that context 'usually pronounced 'laife'

Captain Patterson, publisher of the 'Daily News,' must have thought me utterly mad when in 1937, having concluded a successful summer abroad as a freelance writer and sold everything I had written, I returned to the United States late in October back to the 'Daily News' which I had quit as the highest-paid sports writer in the country and asked them to give me a job at the Guild minimum, which was \$70 a week, as an ordinary city-side news reporter and leg man. Having written successful fiction about newspaper reporters for three years I was now determined to turn the clock back and become one myself

Captain Patterson smiled and complied with my request and so off I went bucketing about the country covering strikes, and murders, labour leaders and politicians, burglaries and trials and all manner of things, and all the while FLOOD was gnawing at my vitals and wanting to be written. And it had nothing whatsoever to do with what I was doing or seeing those days, but only with emotions and fantasies that were going on inside of me and which I felt a deep-seated urge to express. None of the things in FLOOD ever happened beyond the natural catastrophe after which the story is named, nor up to that time or since had I or have I ever seen or covered one of those disastrous Mississippi floods

But how fatuously proud I was of myself when at last I was really a reporter, taking assignments from the city desk and earning my \$70 a week. And when one day, thanks to the fortunate scoring of a beat, Captain Patterson raised my salary to \$100 a week I was as pleased and excited as the day I landed my first short story in the 'Saturday Evening Post,' and went bucketing on with even greater energy to try to absorb more 'life' and more 'copy'

And all through this period I was stealing time during tram or 'plane rides, or in grubby hotel rooms late at night after I had filed my copy on whatever I was covering to work on this wholly imaginative FLOOD story, with which its people and its theme of

comfort a woman can bring a man gave me no rest until it was finished FLOOD apparently got itself written in spite of myself and it took me another year before I was able to appreciate the idiocy of my behaviour and realise that writers listen to or look at what goes on within them Writers write

This truth should not be confused with the necessity for legitimate research for accuracy of background in telling a story And I never fail to research a story idea or novel thoroughly, either by travel or reading or study, but I wasted several years, I think, in finding out that it is a little silly to place the horse before the cart First one ought to have something to say and an overwhelming desire to say it There is then time enough to go about acquiring the knowledge and experience to enable one to say it well

FLOOD

Nobody ever found out what happened to Perry Brown on the flood assignment down through Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee He came back to the *Blade* office at half-past eleven one night to get his mail and had very little to say

He had been gone fifteen days and had filed exactly four stories There had been one good one from Cincinnati on the fire that had devastated the business section, and two from Louisville before all the wires went down And one night a radio amateur located in Winesville, Kentucky, had made an abortive effort to transmit a story to the *Blade* short-wave receiver, purporting to come from one Perry Brown, but there was bad static and interference, and the amateur suddenly went off the air and could not be located again

There had been a hiatus of some seven or eight days when they did not hear from him at all and were a little worried about him, but then came an appeal from Memphis from Perry for funds, although there was no story And shortly after that he came home

Reyburn, managing editor of the *Blade*, was curious and asked Perry Brown, in a friendly enough fashion, what he had been up to, and to give an account of himself Perry looked up from the envelopes he was examining He was pale and looked older He was a big man, and bulky, but he was thinner, and his clothes

fitted him less than they ever did, seemed to hang on him instead. He replied by asking Reyburn a question. 'Where's Rusty?'

'She's still in New Milford on the Agathy trial,' Reyburn replied. 'She was worried until we heard from you from Memphis. What happened to you? You look as though you had been put through a wringer.'

'Nothing,' said Perry curtly, and began to stack his envelopes.

Reyburn grinned at him. 'Didn't like our flood, eh?' he said.

Perry Brown swore bitterly, and Reyburn suddenly saw that something lay behind his eyes. Perry then said, 'I wish to God you had never sent me out on that story,' stuffed his mail into his overcoat pocket, and went out of the office. And that was the last thing anybody ever heard him say about the assignment. A week or so later he seemed quite normal, except that when Rusty McGowan was in the room with him, he never took his eyes from her.

After they had covered the flood and the subsequent fire in Cincinnati, Perry Brown and Al Vogel, the fat photographer, went to Louisville, where they became separated. Vogel was having his troubles getting his pictures back out of the flood area, and Perry was having his own problems piecing together a coherent story out of the chaos of rising water, fear, and rumour. The city officials and the Army engineers were working against growing terror and panic, and the press was not welcome.

There was a curious quality to this horrible rising of the Ohio River that defied Perry. He had covered floods before and had seen those dreadful misshapen islands in muddy water, made by slanting roof tops of houses showing just above the surface, but about this one there was a cold, frightful relentlessness that he could not get on to paper. From that moment he arrived he never moved without fear in his heart. The ceaseless downpour of rain from heavy grey skies helped this. Unless the rain stopped, the end of the world was at hand. Water beneath, water above, Perry felt the stratum in which he still lived and breathed, and witnessed death and life, narrowing, closing in.

Everything that was done seemed helpless and futile because of the rain and the rising river. He watched whole families, miserable, frightened, shivering, panic-faced, moved to higher ground, and knew that if the rain did not stop, soon there would be no more higher ground, that earth water and sky water would meet and the world in between would cease.

Perry had got a break when he encountered a colonel of

engineers he had met on another story, and the colonel had remembered him and let him ride south with him, skirting the flood, in an Army car, and so deeper into new flood area than any other newspaperman had been. And it was while floating in a small hired rowboat over the remains of a little town called Winesville that Perry first experienced the vanishing consciousness of any other world beyond that one which was drowned in moving water, death, and desolation.

A unit of newsreel men who somehow, too, had penetrated to Winesville had captured a corpse. It had caught their cameras unprepared on its lonely, bobbing ride, ferryless, across the Styx, and they were hiding it close to and screened by the gunwales of one of their boats until they could retrain their lenses properly. It had been an old Negro dressed in overalls and a cotton shirt. Their camera boat was held fast to what seemed to be a brick wall rising out of the water, but wasn't, because it was the second storey of a bank building. There was a window just around the corner with gold lettering on it. A A CLAKINS, D D S, CROWNS, BRIDGEWORK, OFFICE HOURS 9 A M - 3 P M

The newsreel men were frightened at first when they saw that Perry knew, and clustered around in their boat until they recognised him. He had seen them before. They were a crew from Imperial Picture News. He lifted his face out of the collar of his slicker, in which it had been buried, and called over. 'A little ghoul-ing, boys?'

One of the cameramen, a big chap, with the rain streaming down his face, called back. 'How'd you get here? Hey, nix, row off a little. Don't look. If one of those soldier boys got wise to us, he might do a little shooting. They killed a looter about a mile down, an hour ago. We're just gonna float this guy by again for a shot.'

'Jeepers,' said Perry, 'and we're supposed to be hard-boiled.'

'What the hell,' said the cameraman. 'He don't care any more. Row off a little, willya?'

Perry put pressure on his oars, moved the boat across what had been the main street, and with short tugs kept the nose of the skiff in the current. Two of the camera crew in another boat began to row slowly up the street. One of them was leaning over the side of the boat, holding on to something in the water. They just kept on rowing, and pretty soon the man who had been leaning over the side was sitting up straight, and a dark object came floating down with the stream, turning over and over with a queer, hapless grace. The large cameraman in the other boat had his right eye jammed against the rubber-cupped finder of his

camera and was grinding rhythmic circles, panning his lens just a little ahead of the floating body

It was then that Perry Brown suddenly was astonished to find himself seriously wondering wherever they were going to show the pictures they were making. Who would look at them? The earth was laid waste by water. It was impossible to think of dry streets and moving-picture houses, and men and women standing in line waiting to buy tickets, and automobiles passing, and boys on bicycles, and traffic policemen standing at intersections. He looked down the watery avenue of what had once been a town. There was the top of a curved electric sign sticking up above the water, with the letters *BIJOU* legible in red and orange-coloured electric bulbs. Perry's quick mind supplied the *U* that lay just beneath the yellowish surface of the stream, and his imagination created an unbelievable, forgotten picture of the Bijou Theatre on Saturday night, with slick-haired boys, and girls with bright-red lips crowding the lobby and being sucked in through the portals as the water was now sucked down the main street.

The dark rotating object passed his boat and kept on going. The movie men, their shot recorded, were letting it go. Two militiamen in a boat, with rifles slung across their backs, shouted up at the newsreel men. 'Hey, you guys! Lay offa them kinda pictures!'

The big cameraman waved back 'O K, O K, buddy!' and they started to row away, but Perry noticed that one of the other men was grinding away at the camera with a long-focus lens. The militiamen stopped Perry's boat and examined his military pass. It was then three o'clock in the afternoon. The grey rain was falling slantwise because there was a wind that was beginning to freshen into a gale. An old motorboat came chugging past. A man in a black slicker with a red cross on his arm was at the wheel. The boat was low in the water with the weight of its burden of men, women, and children wrapped in sodden blankets. Only the men and the children were looking ahead. There were four women in the boat, and all of them were gazing backwards in the direction from whence they had come.

Perry let his boat drift with the sluggish surge of the flood stream. He heard some yelling and guided his boat in the direction from which it came, down a waterway that had evidently been a side street off the main thoroughfare. There was a cluster of boats there manned by natives in thigh boots, slickers, and caps. They were evacuating men, women, and children trapped on the upper floors of houses. The first rise of the water must have been extraordinarily rapid in Winesville, from the number

of people trapped in houses and driven to the second storey and, in some cases, the roof

The yelling was coming from a man who was hanging out of a window a few houses down. The water-level was about five feet below the sill. He was gaunt and unshaven, with sparse grey-black hair, dressed in trousers, collarless shirt, and an open vest.

He had his hands cupped to his mouth and was bawling 'Get a doctor, quick! I gotta get a doctor! D'ya hear down there? Get a doctor! She's gotta have a doctor! Get a doctor over here!'

Nobody paid any attention to him. Perry asked one of the men in the rescue boats where he could find a doctor. The man shrugged. 'Dunno! I ain't seen a doctor for nine hours. We could use a dozen of them. They had 'em at the city hall, but that's under now. That guy's been yelling for three hours. Wife's gonna have a baby. We've had a call in for a doctor with the Red Cross soon as they can spare one. They're all busy.'

Perry Brown rowed over beneath the window. The man leaned down eagerly.

'For heaven's sakes, hurry, doc! It's almost here! Make your boat fast to the bottom of the shutter! I'll give you a hand up!'

Perry called up. 'I'm not a doctor. They've sent for one from the Red Cross. I'll try to get you one.'

The man suddenly lost all control and began to scream curses at the top of his lungs, interspersed with cries for a doctor, as though the very loudness of his voice would bring him what he wanted. He was completely in the grip of panic. From behind him within the room came a woman's cry. Perry wanted to dig his oars into the water and pull hard and keep on pulling until he no longer heard those cries. He found himself thinking suddenly of white-tiled operating-rooms and nickelled tables and instruments, and cool surgeons in white, and blessed anaesthetic. But that was a dream of ages yet to come. This was the Deluge. So must Leah and Rebecca and Mary have cried their agony in lonely huts when God was angered and His waters covered the earth.

The man reappeared at the window, his face livid. He had a shotgun in his hands. He screamed. 'Damn you, doc! Get in here or I'll blow your head off! I'll blow your head off! D'ya hear?'

The shotgun, at the time, didn't impress Perry. His mind was already made up. He fastened the painter of his boat to the shutter and shipped his oars. He said. 'Put that gun away, you fool and give me a hand.'

The man reached down and hoisted Perry up over the sill like

a child, and Perry was a big man. A woman lay on a white iron bedstead over in a corner of the room. Her face was white and wet with sweat, and her mouth was twisted, her untidy hair damp and loose. Perry took off his coat. His knees were trembling and he was afraid that he would not be able to walk. When he was a cub reporter he had many times seen interns arrive, drop off the backs of still-moving ambulances and make kerbstone deliveries in streets, taxicabs, or drugstores. His mind, suddenly, with amazing clarity, reviewed for him those things which must be done. He moved over towards the bed rolling up his sleeves.

Some time later another man came through the window. He had a small black bag with him. He saw Perry and said: 'Ah, doctor, I see you got here ahead of me.'

Perry said: 'I'm not a doctor. I did what I could. For heaven's sakes, take over. I want to get out of here.'

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, looked surprised, and said: 'There isn't much more to do except get 'em out of here. The water's still rising. H'm'm'm. That isn't a bad-looking boy.'

Perry went out the window and dropped into his boat. He felt sick and shocked. When the world went back to the waters from whence it came, no one took death or life seriously any more. He dug his oars into the water, now choppy with the high wind, and let the rain sting into his face. He paid no heed to the direction in which he was going. He didn't care. He was himself close to panic. He felt his tiny boat bobbing under him, and imagined it was the dead streets beneath, struggling to free themselves from the choking water. Chairs floated alongside in the water, and signs, and barrels and boxes, and soggy lumps of feathers that had been chickens. The incessant rain was heavy and made his oar handles slippery. He grated one of them against a piano that was floating on its back, with its ivory teeth showing, and nearly lost it. A dressmaker's dummy stuck its torso half out of the water, and he passed a waterlogged perambulator.

He was conscious that he was suddenly making unusual speed, but not aware why. He thought it was just the desperate power he was putting into the short oars that were always coming out of the wooden rowlocks. It was not until too late that he discovered that he had been rowing directly towards the river. The Army men had warned him against it. With the river gorge under him, he found himself sucked along and helpless amid the forlorn flotsam of the flood. He tried to stem against the current, nearly turned the boat over, and finally spun around in a dizzy circle, caught in a whirlpool. The wind had lashed the surface of the water into wavelets that were dangerous, because they

hid the debris and floating objects that might upset him. Between rain clouds and twilight, it was getting dark.

Perry tried pulling across stream, and was succeeding when the current caught him again and whirled him into the top of a tree that showed just above the surface. A branch struck him a glancing blow on the back of the head and knocked him flat on his face in the bottom of the boat, less than half conscious. When he sat up again, his nose was bleeding. The boat was turning around and around with the current. Both oars were gone. It was still raining. It was dark. Only occasional objects rising from the surface of the water were darker than the sky and the horizon, and therefore faintly distinguishable.

There were no sounds but the rain and the wind and the rush of the stream beneath him, and the scraping of his sodden shoes on the bottom of the boat as he shifted his position. He had a tin dipper in the skiff, and he bailed it fairly dry, and then lay down in the bottom of the boat for better security of balance. He felt that he could no longer sit up in the black void through which he was plunging without falling over out of the boat.

He then gave way to the curiously gentle and soothing sensation of being a lost atom, utterly without power to help himself or shape his course. When his boat banged and scraped against solid objects, he found himself wondering vaguely what they were, and once he struck against something that was soft and there followed a great splashing. At that time, and during that passage, he was not afraid, because there was nothing of which to be afraid. Perry had found that fear was very often occasioned by responsibility and having to do something about something. There was nothing he could do in his present situation but wait for morning. He must have slept for a while—how long he did not know, because the luminosity was worn off his watch dial and it was pitch-black when he woke up. The nearest light seemed to be miles away on an elevation, and he caught the flash of a distant airways beacon.

He was not afraid even then, had no premonition of danger or disaster until his boat suddenly bumped, grated, rolled over, and was gone. Even in the fraction of a second's time occupied by the disaster, Perry was somehow prepared for the cold shock of the water, and kept his head above the surface. He began to fight for his life immediately. He lashed out in the darkness with his left arm and smashed his hand against something wooden and solid, hurting it and running splinters into the palm. He moved his legs automatically to keep his head above water, twisted around, and thrust out more gingerly with his right hand.

He encountered solid wood again, but ridged. His fingers sought for something to cling to, but the current was sweeping him onwards. Then his grasping right hand and arm suddenly thrust through a void, the ridged wood was no longer there, and the next moment he felt a hard blow on the muscle of his upper arm. Involuntarily he contracted it. The palm of his hand came into contact with a smooth surface.

His arm was around a projection of some kind – what, he could not imagine, but the desperate passage was momentarily stopped. The current sucked and tore at his legs and body. He held fast. He tried to think. It seemed impossible to marshal thoughts against the vindictive tugging and sucking at his body, the cold heavy grip of the water, sluicing rain, and the blackness of the night. He was a thinking animal, but the attacks upon him were all physical and came out of darkness. He finally said aloud to himself ‘I still have my hat on. That’s funny.’ Something floating past batted him violently on the shoulder and nearly dislodged him. And now that he was no longer moving through the water, he was badly frightened. His right shoulder felt numb and he did not know how long his strength would hold. He manoeuvred to get his left hand up to reinforce his right in its grasp of the unknown projection. His fingers closed over what seemed to be a narrow strip of wood with an indentation running down the centre in which lay what seemed to be cord.

His fingertips suddenly created a picture in his mind, and his free hand, hurt though it was, wandered avidly to verify it. It was true. His right arm had been thrust through the open window of a half-submerged house – probably the second storey – curled around the side, and his hand was touching a wall. Cautiously he felt for the sill with his elbow. But it was more than two feet below the surface, and he could not reach it and keep his head clear. Was there room overhead? He felt for it, but apparently the entire window was out. He thrust against the powerful current with all his strength, pulling with his right arm, pushing with his left, kicking desperately with his legs against the heavy drag of shoes and pants and enveloping slicker. He banged his knee against the sunken sill, but found a purchase on it and got a leg over, and suddenly the pressure on his body was gone. He was in still water up to his waist, but his feet were on solid flooring. He was inside a room of some sort. His legs and whole body began to tremble with fatigue and nervous reaction. He was so cold that his teeth chattered. But he could think again. The immediate danger was over, he knew.

Was there another floor overhead, or was he at the top of the

house? Was there any way to reach the roof? Was the water still rising, and how quickly? He felt that the last was not immediately important, because remaining in the icy water much longer would kill him eventually anyway. He knew that somehow he must go higher, where it was dry. It was at that time that he first heard the scraping sound from overhead, or thought he did.

Perry waited and listened. He heard rain falling on a roof, and the rushing and gurgling of the flood outside, and his own splashing as he moved closer to the window and jammed his legs up against the space below the sill to steady himself. He tried desperately to stop the chatter of his teeth. He thought that it might have been the branch of a floating tree scraping against the side of the house. Then he heard it again. It did come from overhead and inside the house. If there were human beings above, they might help him.

He called out into the darkness. 'Hey! Hey! Is there anybody up there? Can you hear me?'

His voice sounded dead to him. He felt that it had hardly carried beyond the confines of the window-frame, that the darkness was stifling it.

He heard no reply, and called louder, so that his throat hurt him and his voice cracked like that of a boy. 'Is there anybody up there? Hey! Is there anybody there? Can you hear me up there?'

He heard the scraping sound again and then, directly over his head, the noise of a window being raised. Then a woman answered him. She said, 'Who is it? Who's there?'

The voice was low and rapid, as though the woman's heart were in her throat, as though she were frightened, yet eager. It was throaty and half whispered. She called again. 'Is anybody there?'

Perry Brown stuck his head out of the window, holding on with both hands to the lintel. The rain drove into his face. He could see nothing.

'I am!' he shouted. 'Can I get up there? Where are you? I lost my boat! I caught the window as I was being swept by! Is anybody up there with you?'

The woman replied. 'I'm alone! Where are you from?' Her voice was heavy and languid, with the speech of the district.

Perry called back. 'I'm a reporter! Newspaper! I got caught in the current! My boat rolled over! Is it dry up there? Can I get up?'

'You can try! I'm in an attic room! Reach up!'

Perry, feeling his way carefully, climbed to the underwater

sill, his back to the flood. The water pulled at his legs again. He held on to the side of the window with his right hand and felt above him with his aching left. He touched a woman's hand and arm, newly wet with rain. Then, out of the water-laden darkness, something curious fell athwart his face, startling him. But it was soft and had a strange, damp fragrance. In the blackness his perceptions sharpened. He realised that it was a woman's hair. The arm was firm and round, the hand rough. He pictured the colour of the hair. Because of the darkness that surrounded him he saw it as glossy black. He took in his the hand that he had found in the darkness, and it gave him a queer strength and comfort.

He said 'Howdy. My name's Perry Brown.'

The woman said nothing, but he thought he heard her sob, or cry out softly. Her fingers in his were suddenly limp. Perry said 'Buck up, sister. There's two of us now.' He released her hand and reached above. He felt the sill of a small window. It was not far above his head. He wondered whether he could make it, with the water below sucking and dragging at his legs, and hampered by the weight of his wet clothing. Then he found an iron bracket sticking out from the side of the window, tested it, and found it firm. If he could make it on the first pull-up, he might scramble through before his strength failed.

He said 'Better duck back inside. I'm going to try to make it. I'll either make it on the first try or not at all. When I say "Three," that's it.'

He relinquished his grip on the side of the window with his right hand, seized the iron bracket, and grasped the edge of the sill above as firmly as he could with his injured left. There was not the least glimmer of light to aid him. He had to rely solely upon the picture he had formed in his mind by his sense of touch as to what lay above. He was not afraid, although he had a perfect mental image of what would happen should he miss – felt himself gasping and struggling in the water, turning over and over, beaten and ground and crushed by the vicious flotsam in the current, or swirled under water.

He said 'This is it, sister – one, two, three,' and with all his strength kicked off and pulled upwards. He felt the upper sill at his chest and threw his head forward into the opening of the window, at the same time striving to get a bend in his arms to brace himself through.

But the drag of the water had been too much and robbed his spring of a needed few inches. He hung there, gasping and fighting, kicking, his arms aching and cramped, and he knew that in

another moment there would come a weakness that would be the end. There was fire shooting before his eyes, and his chest was aflame. In terror, he cried out: 'I can't make it!'

Then hands grasped at his collar and shoulders and tugged. In the moment's respite he battled for breath, gave a last kick, and found he was braced on his numbed arms. The tugging continued. The upper half of his body lay across the sill, inside the room. He waited for a moment and then dragged his legs over after it, and collapsed on the floor and lay there, trembling and sobbing for breath.

After a while he recovered a little and said: 'Thanks, sister. Where are you?'

He sat up and felt the woman brush up against him, and found her hand and clung to it. She was trembling. He asked: 'What's the matter?'

Her voice came out of the darkness close to him, low and desperate: 'I'm hungry. Have you any food?'

'Jeepers,' said Perry, and clapped a hand to his coat pocket. He always made it a point to carry chocolate bars with him. They kept him going when he was unable to get regular meals or any meals at all on an assignment. He still had two, wet, soggy, but intact. 'I've got some chocolate. How long since you've eaten?'

'Two days, I think. I don't remember.'

Perry broke off a piece of a bar and peeled the wrapper from it. He put it into her hand and said: 'Go easy, sister. Eat it slowly. You've got to. I'll give you more a little later, but you've got to start easy.'

He heard her eating it in the darkness. When she had finished, he asked: 'Better?'

She said: 'Oh, yes. Yes. Give me more.'

'No. Later. You've got to go easy. It'll hurt you if you eat too much now.'

'When can I have more?'

'Soon. Soon, sister. Be patient. Who are you? How did you get stuck here?'

There was a moment or two of silence. Finally the woman answered: 'I wouldn't leave. The others left when the water started rising. I hid. I couldn't leave.'

The heat of Perry's exertions had worn off. He was cold, and a chill shook him. He thought for a moment and then said: 'Sister, I've got to take my clothes off. They're wet. I'm freezing.'

The woman's voice answered him: 'Yes, you must take them off. I have a blanket you can take.'

Kneeling, Perry stripped off the wet, heavy garments. He heard the woman closing the window. He rubbed himself as best he could, trying to get dry and warm. He heard the woman say

'Where are you?'

'Here,' said Perry, shivering and stretching out his hand. He felt a rough blanket and took hold of it. He wrapped it around himself. The woman took his hand and led him. She said, 'There's a mattress over here in a corner. You can lie down there.'

His feet touched the mattress. He knelt first, feeling its length and direction, and then lay full length upon it, huddled in the blanket. The rain was like the distant roar of surf on the roofing overhead. Another chill rattled Perry's frame. He shook from head to foot, and his teeth began to chatter again. He pulled the blanket around his neck and tried to stop it, but could not. The cold came from deep within him, from his mind as well as his shocked body, and from the pictures he was making in the darkness of the things he had seen that day. Now his heart was frozen with fear as his body was with chill.

He heard the woman speak softly from close by. She said 'You're cold.'

Perry said 'Y-y-y-y-es. I'm s-s-s-sorry. I can't s-s-stop it.'

Then her voice came out of the impenetrable darkness again, deeply and quietly. 'I'll warm you.'

He felt the blanket tugged gently, and relaxed his grip. He was shaking terribly, and his bruises were throbbing. The woman quickly lay down alongside him, pulled the blanket over them. She was wearing a dress of some material that had the texture of cotton, open at the neck. Perry felt her warmth through it. Her arm was under his head. His shaking continued. Once she said to him 'Sh-h-h,' as though speaking to a child. His shaking stopped for a moment and he secured a respite before it began again. The woman held him closer. Perry's head rested in the hollow of her neck and shoulder. The fits of shaking were fewer now. They came at longer intervals. The fear was easing from his heart too. A strand of her hair touched his face. Her arms were strong and warm and brought him deep comfort, helped to banish the dreadful pictures from his mind as the cold was slowly leaving his body.

He had strange powerful thoughts as he lay there, warmed and soothed. Who was his unseen companion in the darkness? A woman. Or woman disembodied, the essence of womanhood? He had not seen her. He did not even know her name. She had spread wings over him. She warmed, sheltered, and comforted

him, shielded his body and was tender to its hurts. As a boy, in reading, the phrase '*Mater Omnium*' had stuck in his mind. His own mother had died when he was very young. But he had remembered her and, as a child, in his daydreams he would picture himself held to her bosom, wrapped within the folds of her robe, warm and safe and in refuge. Was this, then, she? Was he, Perry, a child again and dreaming, as he sometimes did, of the reality of his dream? '*Mater Omnium, Omnium Mater*' – the words chased themselves through his head. Mother of all, mother of the world, mother of man. Through the darkness came only the strong womanhood of this person he could not see. He was warm now and drowsy, hovering between consciousness and sleep. Journey's end – the end of the world – one man and one woman left alive. He said, in a half whisper, 'Thank you!'

'Sh-h-h-,' said the woman once more. Perry fell asleep. When he woke up, the room was full of grey murky light and it was grey out of doors and still raining. The woman was kneeling by the window with her back to him, looking out. He saw that she had blue-black hair that hung down to her waist.

Perry said 'Good morning,' and she started, and then turned around. Her face startled him. She was not beautiful. Her features were so heavy-boned as to be almost coarse. She was young – could not have been more than twenty-six or seven. Her eyebrows were black and strongly marked, and there were hairs between them. Her cheekbones were high, and more prominent because she was thin. The nose was long and straight, the mouth large, full-blooded. The jaw line that ran from ear to chin was slanting, bony, hard. Beneath her cotton dress swelled large breasts, and she was tall and wide-hipped. He was shocked, because he was a romanticist. He knew that he had expected standard beauty. Her eyes, too, were quite dark, her skin pale and roughened.

She said 'You all right?'

Perry sat up and wrapped the blanket around him. 'Thanks to you. I guess you saved my life last night. A couple of times.' They were in a small bare attic chamber. The roof came to a flat inverted V, directly overhead. In it were two trunks, a battered chair with but half a back to it, and the mattress upon which he lay. A cooking-pot with a lid on it stood on the floor. Perry asked, 'Who are you? What's your name?'

'Mary Rud. Rudscienski. They call us Rud for short.'

'Polish?'

'Not me. My husband. I come from around here.' She said it with a kind of pride.

'Where is your husband?' Perry wished then that he had not asked, but the girl shrugged her shoulders

'He got out, I guess - with the kid He made a sort of raft'
'And left you here?'

She shrugged her bony shoulders again 'I don't know He called I wouldn't come This is my home I just couldn't leave it See, it was my home I hid I looked out the window after The raft was spinning around It was half sinking I guess he couldn't hang on any more to the house Maybe the current took him away Maybe they're all gone'

Perry realised that in a matter-of-fact way she was saying that her husband and child might be dead He felt again that she was a primitive, but in a different way from the experience he had had the night before The capacity to suffer deeply called, to some extent, for breeding and imagination This girl must have been bred close, close to the soil, to be so strangely immune to disaster She had made her choice, and it had been to remain He had come upon that trait before in the flood The men got out quickly enough, but the women, many of them, had to be removed forcibly from their homes to save them Their homes It was all they had that was stable and unchangeable and that repaid them love for love The girl's inarticulateness moved him to a queer compassion for her

He said more softly 'And then what happened to you - after?'

Mary Rud stirred and shifted her position, so that she sat on the floor with her back to the window, her hands in her lap, and her head tilted a little to the side at an angle that suddenly struck Perry as inconceivably tender and childlike It softened the harsh jaw line, and the blue-black hair fell to the floor past her shoulder

'I had to come up here The water came faster than I thought it would I moved some food to the second floor, but it was all washed away I got a pot of water up here It's most all gone now. I had a half a loaf of bread, but that's gone Have you any more chocolate?'

Perry broke off a piece of a bar and gave it to her She bit into it quickly with good white teeth, stopped suddenly, and held it out to him, saying: 'You?'

Perry shook his head 'I had a big meal yesterday afternoon Go ahead. You need it.'

But she stopped eating and sat there looking at him with her large dark eyes. Finally she asked 'Where are you from?'

Perry told her at length When he told her about New York, her eyes grew larger. She could not understand why folks in New

York should be interested in what happened to people on the Ohio River, but she wanted to hear stories about the city-fabulous ones. She had never even been to Louisville. She had been born and raised on a farm. For a while she had worked as a waitress in a café in Winesville. As she told of this, Perry, whose mind always made pictures when he was listening to anyone, saw her, short-skirted, full-breasted, in white apron or overall, with her black hair coiled in a knot at the back of her head and a pencil stuck into it, carrying a tray full of dishes, her hips swinging as she walked, and men at tables turning their heads to watch her passage. There she had met Jan Rudscienski, the farmer she had married. She was then nineteen. She said that he was good enough to her. She seemed to dismiss him with that. Perry, city-born and bred, was amazed at her casualness. It was his first experience with the placidity and resignation of those whose constant struggle is with the soil and the forces of nature.

The blanket wrapped around him, Perry went to the window and looked out. To the left, and under water, he saw the slanting top of the roof of a small porch. It was this that had upset his boat the night before. It was still raining. There was water as far as he could see, but no houses. There were the branches of many bare trees rising from the flood about the house, and these had entangled debris of every description - barrels, troughs, gates floated off their hinges, crates and boxes and hencoops. The water was a dirty yellow in colour. Perry raised the window. There was no sound but the falling rain and another like the sighing of wind through a leafy grove, which was the water rushing through the light twigs of the trees, and another, which was a deeper gurgling as the stream bent its way around solid objects.

Perry asked, 'What's around on the other side?'

'Water,' replied the girl. 'The nearest house is three miles.'

He looked down at the window below, from which he had climbed during the night. It was gone. The top of the frame was barely showing level with the surface of the water. 'Hey,' he said, 'it's gone up since last night. It's still rising.'

The girl was not surprised. Of course it was going up. She had been watching it rise for days. She had come to accept it as natural. It would continue to go higher and higher.

Perry examined his clothes. They were damp, but he decided to put them on, hoping the heat of his body would dry them. He turned his back and climbed into them laboriously and, curiously, without self-consciousness. They chilled him at first, but he moved about briskly and managed to warm them a little. He looked into the waterpot. It was a third full. He had a bar

and a half of chocolate left. He went over and knelt at the window beside the girl and said 'Look, kid, we're in a nasty spot.'

He was kneeling with his hands in his lap, she sitting with hers folded, and so they looked at each other. She said nothing, but there was sympathy and a wonderful warmth in her eyes, and a little twisted smile played at the corner of her mouth and disappeared. If he was worried and afraid, she was sorry and wanted him not to be. She was inarticulate, but not with her eyes and body.

Perry thought that she had leaned ever so tiny a fraction closer to him. He could not help himself then. His hands still in his lap, he leaned forward gently and kissed her lips.

That night they huddled again in the darkness and became as one, naturally and without question. But their union was compounded more of pity and loneliness than passion. When they awakened late in the morning of the second day, the yellow waters outside were still rising.

There was no telling how high the water would go. When it came pouring into their attic room, it would drive them to the roof. If it continued to rise, it would sweep them away. The rain never stopped. Perry managed to fill the waterpot with rain-water, but they faced starvation. The remaining bar of chocolate was reduced by half. Perry rationed it, managing to give her the large share of the small amount they dared eat. She had been without food longer than he and already was growing weak.

Mostly she lay on the mattress, while he told her stories of New York. She would lie very quietly and listen to him, and sometimes ask him questions. She knew a smattering about moving-picture stars from movie magazines and occasional visits to the Bijou in Winesville. Her knowledge was limited and bounded by her life. She talked seldom, except to ask him for more stories, but she spoke with simplicity and directness always. And her growing weakness lent her a beautiful dignity.

Perry was amazed to find how beautiful she had become. Each of her strongly marked features had grown dear and tender to him. He was continually discovering beauty where he had seen none before. It was the same face that he had first seen when she turned around in the grey light of the flood morning, but now he found something clean and moving in the slanting line of her jawbone. He loved the heavily drawn eyebrows and the long straight line of her nose that dropped straight from her brow. It reminded him of heads of Minerva he had seen. Her hair was his delight. And her hands, to him, had lost all their roughness, when sometimes she held his head between them.

He never thought of the world he had left, but only of the small one he inhabited now, and the woman who was a part of it and of him. They had so little, and what each had they shared completely. Even as she grew weaker, her fund of tenderness and womanly compassion seemed never to end. Her mouth grew softer and more childlike as it drooped with hunger. Sometimes her dark eyes were glassy.

They never spoke to each other of love. That, too, seemed to be a part of the lost dead world. Perry felt, somehow, in their isolation, that the word was reduced to an absurdity. Once, his mind took him back to a night-club in New York—small tables, men and women crushed knee to knee, mingled smell of perfumes, food, and bodies, the crashing of dishes and the sighing of a band, and a woman with yellow hair and a red mouth, wearing a black satin sheath dress, standing in the spotlight caterwauling about love.

*Life's just a game and we play it,
But I've got to keep hearing you say it,
Tell me it's love, tell me it's love*

She sang it with her arms outstretched in a pleading gesture. Men and women at the tables looked at one another, their lips moist and eyes sparkling. Love, love, love. They had to hear the word a thousand times over, read it in print, see it in pictures, to believe it.

The girl had interrupted his thoughts with a half-whispered 'Is there any more chocolate?'

Perry held her then tightly in his arms, shaken with tenderness and compassion. Also he gave her the last of the chocolate bar—a scrap hardly more than an inch, because he hoped it would lessen in her the awful pangs he felt tearing at his own vitals. She ate it and sighed and clung to him.

Just before nightfall Perry thought that they were going to die, that even the small remaining corner of an expiring world was due to become blotted out. The yellow torrent of water was a scant six inches below the level of the window-sill. Sometime during the night or early morning it would spill into the window and invade their room, cold, stinking, lethal. Flight to the roof was now out of the question. The girl was too weak to help herself. Perry knew that his own strength was insufficient. Morning would find them standing waist-deep in icy water. The next night would find them dead.

Perry didn't tell Mary what he had seen. And that night which was to be their last, he found their positions reversed.

Now it was he who still had strength and compassion and human warmth to give

As long as there was the faintest of grey light to see, and long after it was gone, Perry strained his eyes to see her face, to catch the last line of the beauty of her features

The window was open There was no use in trying to stem the monster when it came for them He heard the rush and gurgle of the water outside, and once the excited chattering of a bird In the far distance he heard another rushing sound, higher in pitch than the rain and the torrent As he listened it was accompanied by the drawn-out, throaty wail of a locomotive, and it made him draw the girl only closer to him He refused to believe it And yet, for a moment, he found himself thinking of Rusty, and the *Blade* office, the city room of his powerful, vital newspaper, with the typewriters clacking and the telephones ringing, and the editors and reporters busy at their desks, and outside the throb and roar of the city

But of those realities he thought as he had thought of the night-club – as things of a thousand years ago, memories bred in him rather than remembered, as once when he had walked the Roman walls of a border city in England he had felt suddenly that he had been there before, that time and space were non-existent, and that there, where he stood on the ancient stone and mortar, gazing down into the tangled underbrush at the wall's base, he had stood once in another age, with the hair on his neck creeping as it was creeping then, awaiting an enemy

Rusty he had loved in the past and would love again She was dear to him for what she had been so many centuries ago In the darkness with this woman in his arms he was again close to the ages that came out of darkness and returned to it This brief passage, then, was over, and he was not unhappy, because he was not alone He knew that not at any time did man face any terror more fearful than to be alone, and was grateful The girl was asleep when he kissed her good-bye Soon he fell asleep too When he awoke, the sun was shining in through the half-open window The room was still dry. He got up and looked out The yellow waters were still below the level of the sill The sky was cloudless, blue, and brilliant He heard a scraping sound from around the corner of the house A rowboat appeared, and then another, a large, flat-bottomed barge There were men in them One of them wore a Red Cross brassard on his arm.

'Hey!' called Perry 'Hey!'

They saw him and rowed over to the window

The man in the small rowboat was a powerful fellow with

blond hair and huge hands His name was Jan Rudscienski and he was the husband of the woman who lay asleep beneath the blanket in the corner of the room He looked at Perry without suspicion, but asked 'How you get here?'

Perry told him briefly He grunted and climbed into the room and asked 'Is she hokay?'

'We're - she's starved,' Perry said 'We haven't had any food except a little chocolate I had' He seemed to be thinking and talking like the normal human being he had been, except that he was weak with hunger

Rudscienski leaned out the window and called 'Hey! She's here Bring some o' that soup'

A Red Cross man came in with a vacuum bottle He went over to the girl and raised her head She opened her eyes for a moment Expressionless, they travelled to Perry, to the man who was her husband, and to the man who held her She drank a little of the hot broth and closed her eyes again The Red Cross man gave some to Perry, who drank sparingly

Mary opened her eyes 'Is Alvis all right?' she asked

Her husband replied 'Yup,' and then said to the Red Cross man, 'We better get her out o' here'

They lifted her across the sill and into the Red Cross barge. In the sunlight Perry noted how blue-black her hair and brows were, and again saw the firm pillar of her neck He put on his slicker and climbed into the barge too, and they rowed away from the house, Rudscienski following in his boat There was no wind, and it was warmer Perry saw high land that had previously been blotted out by the rain, a mile or so away He heard the sound of a motorboat It came over to examine them In it was his friend, the colonel of engineers, and two or three other officers

'Hey,' said the colonel 'So there you are We've had an alarm out for you Are you O K?'

Perry nodded his head

'Want a lift?' asked the colonel 'We're going down as far as Owensboro You can get transportation out there.'

Perry nodded again He was feeling too sick to talk He drank another cup of broth while the motorboat came alongside, and then, with the help of one of the officers, climbed in They cast off immediately and headed south Perry stood up in the boat, propping himself by the gunwale, and tried to call good-bye, but his throat was dry and his head swimming. Mary Rudscienski opened her eyes for a moment and saw him A half smile visited her mouth for the shadow of a moment and then vanished Perry

waved, and Jan Rudscienski and the Red Cross man waved back. Then the farmhouse came between them.

'For God's sake,' said Perry Brown, 'has anybody got a drink?'

'Not officially,' said the colonel. 'Give him the unofficial bottle, Joe.'

One of the officers passed Perry a half-full quart bottle of rye whisky. He drank a good third of it and did not remember very much after that.

Once, when he returned to a consciousness that, for a few seconds, was not fraught with memories of Mary Rudscienski, he found himself in bed in a hotel room. A Negro bellboy was standing at his side, gazing at him with large eyes that showed their cream-whites.

'Where am I now?' Perry asked.

'De Acropolis Hotel, Memphis, suh.'

'How'd I get here?'

'Deed, Ah don' know, suh. Yo jus' came here, Ah guess. Ah been takin' care o' you, suh. Yo clothes is all cleaned and pressed, and I had yo underthings washed. Yassuh, boss!'

'Have I eaten anything?'

'Guess so, boss. You et everything. Ah been bringin' Ah been takin' care o' you, boss!'

'Is there any more whisky?'

'Fetch yo some, boss.'

While he waited, Perry's eyes wandered about the room. There was a telephone on the bedside table, and a Gideon Bible. A Whistler print hung on the opposite wall. He got up and went to the window and looked out, and was shocked when he saw no limitless expanse of turbid yellow waters with the naked tree-tops breaking the surface. The street below was crowded and noisy with traffic, cars and trucks, and hurrying people skipping between them. There was a five-and-ten-cent store directly opposite, and for a while he watched the women thronging in and out the doors. The sanity of the familiar store sign and the display of merchandise behind the plate-glass window was healing.

He remembered times in the last few days when he had awakened so full of a nostalgia for something that was gone beyond recapture that there was no fight left in him. Miserable beyond comprehension, he drank quickly, only for the anodyne of unconsciousness. As a boy, Perry had often for a day been haunted by the escaped beauty of a dream. What had happened to him in the flood-bound house had already taken on the quality of a dream, but it still shook him, physically and mentally, beyond bearing. Perry Brown was a reasoning animal, but it was not

either with or against reason he was fighting, but against a terrible sense of loss of something that had been beautiful. At times he was half driven to the insane determination to find Mary Rud again, to try to ease the pain by once more pressing his cheeks to hers, to feel the softness and sweetness of her mouth, and to close his eyes in the peace of her arms.

But he knew that that really was not his loss. He recognised that he had been in a world to which he could never again return, that he was shut out from it as though what had taken place had occurred on another planet, hundreds of light-years away. It was then that he would drink again.

The view from the window helped. People, cars, policemen, newsboys, stores, and the wholly concrete and soothing display of bottles and paper flowers and cheap glassware and knick-knacks in the five-and-ten opposite – this was, after all, a world he had known and loved and could live in. It was still there. With a sudden rush of tenderness and shame he thought of Rusty, with her copper-coloured hair and grey-green eyes, and wide mouth with the half-humorous smile. Somewhere, busy, keen, alive, she would be on the trail of a story. When she saw him again, her face would light up with that look he loved, half amused, half tender, and wholly loyal.

He shook himself and went away from the window. The objects in the room no longer looked strange to him. They no longer hurt him. This was where he belonged. He picked up the receiver of the telephone and replaced it again, then lifted it and sent a telegram to the office to send a hundred dollars.

The bellboy came back with a bottle of whisky. Perry paid him for it and then gave it to him with a ten-dollar bill, saying, 'You keep it, son. I don't want it. Beat it. Tell the porter to get me space on the night train for New York.'

Three hours later he put on his clothes, paid his bill, and went home.

Did you see the Coronation?

This in every sense of the word is a period piece. To the modern generation it will appear as dated as the bustle or the Lambeth Walk. The Coronation referred to was that of the late King George VI which took place in 1937, and, of course, the language spoken by the two characters involved, Swing and Audrey, a pair of débutantes from Chicago, is as obsolete as beatnik talk will be ten years from now.

Yet I could not resist the temptation to include this story in this volume for Swing and Audrey are old friends and stories about them ran in the 'Saturday Evening Post' from 1937 through to 1945.

The characters are based on two young ladies I met while crossing to England on the SS 'Statendam' early in 1937. Great heavens, that was twenty-three years ago and I still keep thinking of them as débutantes in spite of the fact that both are long married and have children of their own. In fact I attended Swing's wedding in Chicago.

They were eighteen when I first encountered them on the 'Statendam,' and bound for England to spend the spring and part of the summer as paying guests in Devonshire, later to be joined by Audrey's mother on the Continent. Swing and Audrey are not their real names. We met during the course of a progressive bridge game in the ship's lounge, and when we introduced ourselves, they announced that they were 'Two débutantes - from Chicago' - just that way with a kind of swing and rhythm to it and also a great sense of importance and fitness, the way one might say 'Doctors - from Edinburgh' or 'Painters - from Paris'.

One was a quiet, dreamy, bookish child, the other a lively, bouncing, merry, and athletic little cricket. And they spoke a jargon such as never before had assailed my ears, a compendium of débutante slang and young things' idiom full of such aptness, toughness, and gaiety that I was captivated. I just wanted to listen to them talk so that I too might learn this marvellously expressive

language which could convey ideas and shades of meaning from which apparently ordinary English-speaking peoples were quite hopelessly cut off. It had a considerable vocabulary all its own, and eventually when we became fast friends – a friendship that has included their families and lasted down through the years – they helped me to compile for my own use a kind of *débutante* dictionary, which was constantly enlarged and added to as new expressions came up.

But there was more to them than glossology, for in addition to superb manners, good breeding, and sweet natures there was their outlook on life.

Daughters of wealthy and prominent families in Chicago, they had made their *débuts*, or 'come out' simultaneously – up to that moment the crowning event in both their lives, for which they had apparently pointed from the cradle. They were clothed and cloaked in *débutante*hood. They accepted its majesty like training for the throne, which, once achieved, from then on armoured them both against all and any troubles, from minor emotional disturbances to major cataclysms that included fire, flood, and earthquake. Their thinking and feeling, everything they did or that happened to them, were seen or evaluated from the point of view of two who had had the great good fortune to be brought up as *débutantes* – from Chicago. Nothing was impossible to a girl who had gone through that mill, or could be expected to faze her. All life could be rationalised to fit into some compartment of this training. It gave them an impregnable and wholly charming self-assurance.

That was the spring of the Coronation of the late King George VI and which, oddly enough, I attended in the capacity not of a reporter, but of a photographer. An English friend of mine, Tom Noble, at that time Studio Chief and Art Director for the Kemsley newspapers, had need of every camera and operator that could be marshalled for that event. I had a Leica. I got to see the Coronation. And I should say that one of the milestones of my career in which I took the greatest pride was the appearance in the 'Daily Graphic,' at least for one edition, of one of the pictures I took. Was there ever a clown who didn't want to play Hamlet?

The *débutantes* came up to London for the Coronation too and pronounced it just too, too divine, and we all went together to the Coronation Ball.

Somewhere during this period developed the itch to involve my two *débutantes* in the Coronation in a short story. Somehow I had to get Swing and Audrey into Westminster Abbey. The fun of writing fiction, of course, is that if you work at an idea long enough there is nothing one cannot do and within a week I had

what I thought was a fairly watertight sequence of events I had rented my cottage in Devon again and when Audrey's mother joined them in England they all came down to Salcombe and stayed with me for a week, during which time I pursued my studies of their language assiduously, and DID YOU SEE THE CORONATION? was the result

The plot of the story is pure fiction No such thing happened, of course, but with Swing and Audrey on the loose in England, it could have happened The girls and their speech, however, and their outlook upon life and the infectious and sometimes touchingly gallant youthfulness that animates them are, I think, accurately reported They were always helpful and considerate and breathless and wriggling with zest for life and always about to perish with excitement, I mean absolutely pass out and quietly die from hysterics over whatever was going on or happening to them

The decision to use the device of having one of the girls narrate the story was made for verisimilitude and credibility as well as from the fact that it enabled me to write the entire story in the queer private language of the young things of that day

There is used in this story likewise a trick, an opening gambit, which formula I shamelessly pinched as developed by Mary Roberts Rinehart in her wonderful Tish stories running at that time

This opening gambit appears to be almost an incoherent and scrambled rehearsal of difficulties and problems, plus a veiled forecast of what is about to happen in the story

This type of opening serves a double purpose It is a come-on to hook the interest of the reader, and at the same time it serves as a kind of innocent blind in which to bury four or five 'plants,' ridiculous or innocuous-sounding statements all of which have a later bearing in the story You encounter the principles of the 'plant' nearly every time you go to the theatre to see a play When, for instance, in the first act a character goes over to a desk, opens a drawer, takes out a pistol, examines it to see if it is loaded, replaces it, and closes the drawer, you can be sure that before the evening is over someone is going to be shot with it It is a cardinal rule of story writing, and one, as I recall, that is taught in all the courses, that the reader must be put into possession of all the facts You are not permitted to spring surprises on him in the professional league

It has always seemed to me that a little such technical knowledge would increase the average reader's enjoyment of a story A skilful plant enhances rather than interferes with the narrative and it is fun after finishing a story to check back over it and see

whether the author has played fair with you throughout If he hasn't, you are entitled to complain twice - once to the writer and again to the editor who let it go through That's what editors are for

I wrote the story during the time of the girls' visit and read it to them when I had finished it They corrected a few minor philological errors and then announced that they just couldn't bear it, it was just too, too divine, they meant absolutely extra amusing I hope you find it, even at this late date, somewhat the same

DID YOU SEE THE CORONATION?

Did you see the Coronation? Wasn't it just too snappy for words? It was so divine when that old love of an Archbishop lowered the crown on top of the King's head I simply wept I've never been so touched in my life Swing said the King looked as though he were trying to duck, but then Swing simply hasn't any reverence for anything She was perfectly furious, and didn't want to come at all first, because they had made Edward abdicate, but then, after all, what was the use of being in England and not seeing the Coronation, especially when it was so easy?

Wasn't it too ridiculous, all the fuss they made about how hard it was to get seats, and all the crowds and everything? Why, we had no trouble at all. Well, practically none, unless you count Swing's getting the hiccups just as the Queen was being crowned, and, of course, being so close - that is, standing right behind her, almost - it was really awful for a moment, until she suddenly caught a glimpse of that perfectly dismal Captain Fizz, and that frightened her so she stopped Oh, and then, afterwards, when Captain Fizz chased us into the Sultan's carriage, it was a little awkward for a moment I mean it might have been, but the Sultan turned out to be extra-genial, even if he was a coloured man And Swing made such a hit with him when she worked his fly-swatter for him He wanted to marry her right away I just had a picture of Swing breaking in on the family in Chicago, with an airy 'Hello, darlings, this is the Ambeok of Negotora, Sultan of Amu Penang We're going to be married' Can't you just see

their faces? Oh, and of course Captain Fizz turning out to be who he was was rather fortunate, because our families never would have understood it if we had gone to jail, although the jails are quite different over here, and they never put anything into the papers, even if it's true

You see, we never would have been at the Coronation at all if Swing weren't such a fiend at bridge, and, of course, I always hold the cards, and that nasty Major Putrington and his wretched wife trying to take advantage of us just because they knew our families had plenty of chips—I mean it served them right—and so, when we did have the chance to buy two tickets for the Abbey cheap, it seemed as if we ought to do it

And, of course, when Captain Fizz kept trying to put us out, it really wasn't his fault, because he didn't know who we were then, and although it was Swing's idea to take the sandwiches with us, it was mine to give some to the pathetic old gentleman who looked so tired and hungry, and, of course, when he turned out to be the King's uncle, we were almost as surprised as Captain Fizz was I mean Captain Fizz knew he was the King's uncle, but not that he knew us, and Swing's reaching down and retrieving the Queen's handkerchief helped, too, because when she dropped it, all those stiff English women just stood around with egg on their faces And now, because the Queen smiled at her, Swing is giving herself airs just as though she had been presented at court, though we could have been if we had wanted to Perhaps it would be better if I explained everything

You see, we are débutantes from Chicago

Swing and I came out together in Chicago It was the biggest party of the year We had three floors at the Palmer House Never saw so many college boys boozed at one time in all my life Well, after that it was a plenty hectic season, we just had to keep going, and, of course, Swing and I acquired a couple of stooges, awfully nice boys, and we really were more than a little fond of them—I mean we were serious, even though we were only eighteen—and then—well, I mean our families stepped in So that's how Swing and I came to be parked in Devonshire together for six months to cool off, at Grammorton House, Fenley Moors, Little Downey.

Well, we had been plenty free with the family chips last winter, so we didn't at all mind being put on an allowance I guess Swing will come into ten or twelve millions when she comes of age, but you would never guess it, to be with her, and though Dad isn't exactly a pauper, he has always made me count my pennies You see, Swing is really Janet Pierce, and Mr Pierce

—Harriman Pierce—is the owner of the Harriman Pierce five-and-ten-cent stores, only I call her Swing, and I am Audrey Westmar, and if you have to look at our pictures in the roto-gravure sections all the time, it isn't our fault, we really only came out to please our families, and if you think it is an easy life being a *débutante*, you just try it some time

So there we were, sort of under the thumb of Mrs Grammorton, down in Devon, and it really wasn't so bad, even if we did have to dress for dinner every night, and some of the other guests there were just too peculiar for words, but, of course, there was just no chance of our going up for the Coronation, because we had promised not to exceed our allowance and we knew everything was just frightfully expensive there and we really did want to see England, and it wasn't so bad being away from our stooges, because one good thing about a stooge that's anywhere half decent is that he'll keep. So we really just gave up the idea of the Coronation—that is, until the bridge game

You see, we used to play bridge after supper with the other guests at Grammorton House, and, of course, we never play for more than sixpence a hundred, and somehow we always found ourselves at a table with Major Putrington and his wife. The major was old and maggoty and all sort of stringy, with a most dreadful wife. Swing said she always looked as though she were getting ready to answer a telegram that had bad news in it. So one night, about a week before the Coronation, the major asked us if we didn't want to increase the stakes, and we thanked him and said no, that we never played for more than ten cents a hundred back home, which was quite true, because once I played for half a cent a point, and Dad heard about it and nearly had a kitten

Mrs Putrington gave us a sickly-sweet smile—Swing said later that it reminded her of eating pomegranates—and said 'We understand here that in America one always plays for very high stakes'

'Well, we don't,' said Swing, 'because we can't afford it'

'Aha!' laughed the major, just like that 'Aha, aha! Jolly good. Can't afford it. Aha! I say, that's jolly good. It's been so dashed dull here. Thought you might want to stir things up a bit. Can't afford it. Oh, you Americans! Aha! Jolly good!'

I caught the 'I-want-to-talk-to-you-alone' signal from Swing and went up to our room. She came up a moment later and said 'How much money have you got?'

I said 'Eight pounds. But it's got to last me until the end of the month.'

'Give it to me,' said Swing 'I've got seven That makes fifteen We'll just have to stay home if we lose it Our rent's paid here, so we can eat and sleep'

I said 'Oh, Swing, what are you going to do?'

She said 'Play that pair of maggots They've found out that our families are chip-heavy and they want to take us for expenses Jolly good sport, milking two eighteen-year-olds Let's go And for heaven's sakes, Audrey, no psychics'

'Oh, Swing, I'm nervous'

'You hold them, I'll play them,' said Swing 'Anyway, the Puttringtons are still playing out of the book we threw away three years ago I am ever glad I was educated as a débütante'

When we came back, Swing said sweetly - she has beautiful manners 'So sorry we kept you waiting What stakes would you like to play for?'

'Eh? Eh?' said the major 'Oh, I say, that's jolly good London Club stakes Pound a hundred suit you?'

I nearly fainted, but Swing said calmly 'That's fine Shall we cut for deal?'

Swing is a very deceptive bridge player She looks as if she had no interest in the game at all, or were thinking of something else, or were half asleep She is a tall, quiet girl with lots of dark hair and a faraway look in her eyes, and when someone bids, it always seems to startle her, but that doesn't fool anybody in our crowd in Chicago any more. But, you see, it completely fooled the Puttringtons

So that was how we got the money to go to the Coronation Mrs Grammorton always makes everyone stop playing at midnight, because all the lights go out then, and the major had to give us forty-seven pounds, mostly because once Swing woke up out of what seemed to be a sound sleep, not having said anything but 'Pass,' and doubled their two no-trump bid, caught them with a weak suit, smelled out my strength, and set them 1400 When Mrs Grammorton found out the next day what had happened, she was plenty annoyed, and the major and his wife had to leave

Mrs Grammorton put her foot down first at our going to the Coronation alone You see, being English, she doesn't understand that American girls, especially débutantes, are different and can go anywhere by themselves, so we told her we had relatives in London, which was true, except that we weren't going to look them up, because, as Swing said, what was the fun of going to the Coronation if you went with relatives, so she finally relented

and said we could go. We called up the Harriman Pierce Stores representative in London and he got us a wonderful room in a lovely old house off Hanover Square. We rode up to London in a third-class carriage and took our lunches with us to save chips, as we figured whatever of Major Putrington's money we didn't spend on the Coronation we would use for shopping.

Of course, nobody could get inside the Abbey without an invitation, and the most we hoped for was to wait until the last minute and then try to buy a cheap seat in a window somewhere to see the procession, and Swing said from some of those windows that had grandstand seats in them we ought to be able to see the plumes in the hats as they went by, if they were tall enough, and why didn't we wait and save our money, and then go to the circus when we got back home instead?

We tried all over, but the good seats were all sixty dollars apiece and the cheap ones twenty-five dollars each, and when we thought of the tailored suits we could get in New Bond Street for that, we simply couldn't make up our minds what to do. So when the nice young Englishman we met at lunch at Quaglino's offered to sell us two seats inside the Abbey for six pounds each, which is sixty dollars for both, it sounded plenty good to us. Of course, we didn't actually meet him. I mean he was sitting at the next table and spoke to us after a while. Of course, we don't speak to strange men unless they are obviously college boys and not too tight, but Englishmen are different and all sort of quite harmless.

So, when this man at the next table smiled and said 'You young American ladies are over for the Coronation, I take it,' it seemed perfectly all right, so I told him we were, and when he asked whether we had our seats, I explained just how things were to him, he was really very nice, with sort of sandy hair and pale-blue eyes and not much chin, but then, all the Englishmen with chins are put right into the Army or the Navy. So then he said 'How would you like to sit right inside Westminster Abbey?' So I said 'That would be plenty good. Can it be done?'

He said he had two tickets and he couldn't go, but inasmuch as we had none, he would be glad to sell them to us for a small sum. He said he would give them to us, except that they belonged to a friend who wanted to get rid of them. Of course we asked to see them, and he explained that he couldn't show them to us there, because in England it was a very great crime to sell tickets to the Abbey, and there were so many people about, but if we would walk a little ways with him, he would show them to us. Swing kicked me and said 'It sounds like a gyp,

but I kicked her back and said. 'Shut up, he hasn't got our money yet'

So we left Quaglino's with him and walked down Bury Street towards St James's, and after a while he showed them to us, and even Swing had to admit that she was wrong, because they really were two tickets for Westminster Abbey, and they had the crown on them and everything, and the name of the King, George, with his number after it. They were really extra-official, engraved in gold. So we paid him, and he thanked us and jumped into a taxi and drove away. He really was very nice.

Well, we were simply perishing to think we were really going to be inside the Abbey for the Coronation, until Swing suddenly remembered about clothes, and, of course, we didn't have any court dresses, but, luckily, we had brought our white evening dresses up to London just in case we should meet anyone who would ask us out, and I said we could go to Selfridge's and buy some white elbow gloves and some white feathers to put in our hair, and Swing said that you didn't wear feathers to a Coronation, you wore tiaras, feathers were for presentations, so we had a fight about that, but we finally bought a pair of rhinestone tiaras and a few odds and ends, and then we got all the papers and read the instructions, and found that we would have to get up at half-past five in order to be at the Abbey at six-thirty in the morning, and Swing said that that was a lot of nonsense, that the ceremony didn't begin until half-past ten, and she wasn't going to get there until nine o'clock, which was early enough.

I said that the papers warned that nobody would be allowed through after seven o'clock, but Swing said that with those tickets we had we ought to be able not only to get through but to sit next to Queen Mary, which was funny, because the way it turned out, it was Elizabeth we were next to, and not Mary, and she is a lamb, and just as sweet as she can be, and I wished we could have given her some of our sandwiches, poor dear, she did look so hungry.

Oh, yes, I almost forgot about the sandwiches. You see, it said in the papers that guests in the Abbey would have to go eight or nine hours without eating, and of course Swing just hates to go more than three hours without a bite, and so we made up some sandwiches to take along, and then found we didn't have any place to put them, because we weren't taking any bags or anything, and I said we couldn't walk into Westminster Abbey carrying our lunch, and Swing said she wouldn't mind carrying her lunch and a bottle of beer, if they didn't mind, and then I saw her looking at my dress in a very strange way, and that

solved it, you see, because although it was a very simple dress, it had two panniers of white satin at the side, and so we just cut the panniers open and put two sandwiches on either side and basted them up again, and it really didn't hurt the dress at all – in fact, it helped it a little, making it sort of old-fashioned, like a bustle

I wanted to start early, the morning of the Coronation, but Swing said that was silly, that they just said that to frighten people and that we should be there in plenty of time, and so we didn't get up until eight o'clock and put on our white evening gowns, and, of course, no make-up at all, because it would have looked just too horrible in daylight, and our tiaras really were quite stunning, and so we left the house at a quarter to nine and found one of those funny little taxis cruising around – only this was an antique, and plenty decrepit, Swing said she was sure it had been used for Queen Victoria's Coronation – and we got in and told the driver to take us to Westminster Abbey

He gave us a very funny look, though I'm sure it wasn't because of the way we were dressed, because people in England wear evening dress at some of the oddest hours, and then he said 'Will I drive you right up to the haltar, miss?'

We said no, just to take us around to the front entrance. Then he climbed down from his seat and came and opened the door and looked at us for a moment, and shook his head and climbed back into the seat. He said we would be lucky if he got to within a mile of the Abbey, and then he started the machine's one lung and we drove off.

We seemed to be driving around for a long while, and all of a sudden we came down a narrow street and up behind a crowd and stopped. We told him not to stop, but to go right on, and when he said 'Yes, miss, will I go hover or hunder the people?' Swing told him not to be a bore, but to blow his horn, because we had tickets, and it startled him so that he did, and a policeman came over and said 'Here, what's all this? Going to the Coronation, Bertie? Didn't you read the regulations? Come on, out of it now, quickly.'

Swing said 'Tell him we're débutantes,' but I let down the window of the cab and showed the policeman our tickets. He looked at them for a long time as though he were completely baffled, and even took off his helmet and scratched his head, and then put his helmet back on again before he said. 'Well, now, young misses, I've seen a lot of queer ones in my day, but this beats them all. Did you buy these tickets?'

I told him we had and had paid six pounds for them, and

wanted to go through because we were late for the Coronation, and would he please fix it so our driver could go ahead?

At that he gave us a most dismal smile and said 'Well now, young misses, I am very sorry, but I am afraid you have been took in. You cannot go through here with those tickets, and the reason you cannot go through is—'

Well, we never found out what the reason was—at least not then—because at that moment there was a terrific honking in back of us from an enormous limousine that seemed to have pulled up behind us, and a voice shouted 'Here, here, Jenks! What's all this? Clear the way here! This car must get through!'

The voice came from another policeman, only he was older and had a moustache and more stripes than our policeman.

Our policeman saluted and said 'Sorry, sergeant I was just explaining to these here two young ladies as how they couldn't go through because—'

'Never mind the two young ladies, Jenks! Come, come, show some life! His Grace's car must be let through! Lively now! Get that taxi out of there!'

Well, there was no room to turn around, so the policeman opened up a way through the crowd and waved us on through, saying to the driver 'Hup, go on, Bertie. And see that you turn off inside, or I'll have your licence'.

So that is how we got through into the Coronation area, except that Bertie—if that was our driver's name—couldn't turn off when he got inside, because we were on a sort of a circle, or circus, as they call them in London, and another big limousine with a crest on the door shot out from the side and got in front of him and the big one in back of us closed in behind, and there we were, in a sort of procession of big cars. I asked Bertie which way we were going, and he said 'To the Abbey, miss. I can't turn off now. I'm caught.'

'Well,' I said, 'that's where we wanted to go in the first place.'

'I wonder what's the matter with our tickets,' Swing said.

I said 'Nothing. You'll see! The policeman was just being difficult. They all are.'

So that's how we got to the Abbey, and it was perfectly simple, and when we got there, our taxi had to wait in line while the people got out, and I must say, I never saw so many beautiful uniforms in all my life. Swing said they all looked like lion-tamers. And finally our taxi drew up to the little side door and we got out, and while Swing paid Bertie, I got out our tickets, and then we went up to the door, and there were two attendants there

in sort of medieval costumes, and one perfectly stunning man in the most gorgeous uniform, with gold lace and a lot of medals on his chest and a red band around his hat and a short moustache and the most perfect white gloves, so we showed them our tickets and just prepared to sweep on by, when the two attendants stopped us, and they called to the stunning creature, and he came over and had a look at our tickets, and first he got red in the face and then he began to fizz in the strangest way, just like something boiling over, and he gave Swing and me an awfully black look and finally said

‘I say, look here You know, you can’t do this’

‘Can’t do what?’ said Swing ‘We’re not doing anything We’re just going to the Coronation’

The man fizzed again, and got quite purple before he said ‘No, you’re not! What dashed cheek! Americans, I’ll wager!’

I said ‘Certainly, we’re Americans We’re débutantes from Chicago And we have our tickets for the Coronation, and we want to go in I know we’re a little late, but you needn’t be so fussy about that So are a lot of other people’

‘Late? Late? I should think you are late Dashed insolence Look here You’ll have to go right away Those tickets are no good at all’

Swing whispered. ‘Oh, oh I knew there was something peculiar about that man’

But I wasn’t going to go away without an argument, so I said ‘Oh, yes, they are We paid six pounds apiece for them How dare you say they’re no good when they have the crown and everything on them, and the name of the King and the Abbey?’

Well, this time the man really fizzed He was so mad – you see that’s why Swing and I named him Captain Fizz – and then he took the tickets and held them in front of us and said ‘Can either of you young ladies, by any chance, read?’ So, of course, we told him we could, and then he said ‘Well, then, would you oblige me by reading this’ – and he pointed with his finger So I read out. ‘Coronation of His Majesty George—’

‘Yes, go on,’ said Captain Fizz ‘And what comes after that?’

‘Why, a V – a five,’ I said – ‘George the Fifth. What’s wrong with that?’

‘Oh, I say,’ said the captain, after having fizzed terrifically ‘What’s wrong with that? Oh, nothing, except that this is the Coronation of George the Sixth That ticket was good twenty-six years ago, but not today.’

‘Oh, come,’ said Swing. ‘Don’t be a boor. What difference does

it make? It's almost George the Sixth. And besides, we paid for them.'

'Can't be helped,' said the captain, fizzing frightfully 'You must go right away from here, or I shall have to call a policeman. Look here, now, you're holding up all these people . Oh, I say, now you have done it!'

You see, he had turned around to see who was waiting. And, of course it was the people who had been in the huge limousine right behind us, and the man was sort of tall and greyish, and really wearing a most wonderful uniform, and as soon as he saw him, poor Captain Fizz turned quite red and straightened up and gave him the most intense salute, and the two attendants at the door who had sort of things like boat hooks in their hands, they got quite rigid and presented their boat hooks, and so, while they were saluting, Swing and I just walked on in, because, after all, it wasn't our fault they had put the number of the wrong George on the ticket, and, as Swing said later, if it had been King Edward, as it should have been, that never could have happened, and anyway we had paid for the tickets, and just because our families have plenty of chips is no reason why we should simply throw money away.

So you see, that's how we got into the Abbey, and it really was quite easy, and I could never understand why people made such a fuss about how difficult it was, because there we were, inside with the wrong tickets, and I'm sure we could have got in just as easily with no tickets at all.

Swing said we'd better find seats right away, so we started looking for some, but of course the Abbey was simply jammed - I mean I never saw so many people - and of course it was the most glamorous sight, and most of the time we just stood around and stared like a couple of goops at all the robes and the ermine and the jewellery, and every time we would get settled somewhere, someone in a different kind of uniform would come along and make us move out, really, I never felt so hunted in my life. We held on to our tickets, but we wouldn't let anybody see more than a little bit of them, for fear they would notice they were for the wrong Coronation.

And then, of course, we got lost in the Abbey; it's the most tremendous place you ever saw and just full of tombs, and we kept wandering around and hiding behind them whenever we saw anyone with a uniform who looked like an official, and finally we thought we saw an aisle leading down to a place that seemed to have some empty seats, and we thought maybe the people who had the seats wouldn't come, and anyway, if they

did, we would be there first, because, you see, it was getting late, so we fairly whipped down the aisle and ran straight into Captain Fizz I was simply terrified

Well, you see, we had no way of knowing that the seats we had seen were the ones the King and Queen and the peers and things were going to sit in until they were crowned, or, of course, we never should have gone near the place, and all of a sudden there we were, surrounded by archbishops and things, and poor Captain Fizz was quite purple with rage, and we knew he was about to do something dreadful to us, because, really, I have never seen a man so mad in all my life, so we turned and streaked, only, in the excitement, we ran the wrong way, with Captain Fizz and a lot of men who looked like butlers or footmen after us, and just then the organ began to play and then a lot of people in costume came walking up the aisle where we were

First there were three sorts of heralds, right out of *Alice in Wonderland*, and then some men in the most beautiful costumes, carrying a lot of jewellery, and, of course, we would have recognised the Queen, even if there hadn't been six sort of butlers holding up her train, and all the little boys up in the gallery simply screaming '*Vivat Regina Elizabeth*' at the top of their lungs, and a lot of women walking behind her, and maids of honour in white dresses and tiaras You see, we had walked right into the Queen's procession, and there was the captain right behind us, fizzing most horribly

Well, everyone was giving us grim looks, and the captain had turned absolutely violet when Swing, who wasn't a bit upset - she never gets upset, which, I guess, is another good thing about the training of a débutante - said to Captain Fizz 'Calm down now, and tell us what you want us to do, and we'll do it If you hadn't hunted us so, this wouldn't have happened'

Well, the captain's eyes simply started from his head, and the procession was practically on top of us when he found his voice and whispered 'Fall in For God's sake, fall in or I'm ruined'

Swing grabbed my hand, and before I knew what was happening, we were walking in the procession with the maids of honour, and it was all done so quickly that nobody really knew what had happened I whispered to Swing 'Swing, my knees are knocking together so hard I'm sure everybody can hear it,' and Swing whispered back, 'Shut up and keep going We'll just do what they do It looks as though we were going to have a good seat for this Coronation' And later she whispered 'Don't look now, but I think the King is walking right in back of us.'

Well, of course, we didn't really have a seat at all, because the ladies-in-waiting and maids of honour don't sit, but stand up around the Queen on either side, but, of course, we didn't mind standing a bit, because, you see, we were right where the Coronation was happening, and Queen Mary was sitting in a sort of a box with a lot of people right behind us, looking really royal Somehow, when we were all arranged, we were standing almost next to Queen Elizabeth, who seemed to be a swell person, and she wasn't a bit nervous, and I was getting over being frightened, except that I whispered to Swing 'If anyone starts counting maids of honour, we're lost,' and Swing said 'No one's going to start counting, but if anyone looks at our feet, we're sunk'

Well, of course, English girls have got the most tremendous feet, poor dears, and the maids of honour, who, we later found out, were all peeresses, seemed to have really extra large ones, so Swing and I hid ours under our dresses as best we could, and then the King came along with his glittering procession and his butlers, and I must say I have never seen butlers dressed so beautifully, and, of course, there were the crown jewels, right out of the Tower, close enough for us to touch

So, you see, that explains how we got right up close to the Coronation, I mean if we had got any closer we would have been the Coronation, and somehow, just before the ceremony started, Captain Fizz managed to slip behind us and fizz. 'I'll see you in quod for this And if you make any kind of slip, dashed if I won't strangle you both.'

Swing whispered 'Don't be silly Compared to the reception line at a débutante tea in Chicago, this is easy'

Well, I was never so impressed with anything in my life as the way that lamb of a King - I think he is much more attractive than Edward - went through all the things they made him do I mean they were always taking clothes off him and putting others on him, and praying over him, and giving him things to hold and then taking them away from him again before he could really ever get a look at them, and I suppose if he ever really wants to see the crown jewels, he'll have to go to the Jewel Tower and look at them there, because he would hardly get his hands on anything before some dear old Archbishop would dash up and remove it and give it to someone else, and then all of a sudden they handed him a whole lot of things at once, and I honestly never felt so sorry for anyone in my whole life, because he had a golden ball with a cross on it in one hand, and a sceptre in the other, and something else in his lap Swing said the poor

man looked exactly like a college boy at a tea party, trying to balance a plate on his knee, with a teacup in one hand and a sandwich in the other

Then the Archbishop took a sort of golden duck and unscrewed his neck – or maybe that happened before – I mean there was so much happened – and poured some oil out on a golden spoon, and for a moment I thought he was going to give it to the poor King, who looked as though he was ready to submit to just anything, but instead he just dipped his finger in it and made his mark on the King

Oh, and I almost forgot the part where the Archbishop introduced the King to everybody in the Abbey on all four sides, and everyone shouted ‘Long live the King!’ and trumpets sounded and I just had shivers all up and down my spine

It was while the Archbishop was fussing with the crown before putting it on the King – the poor old thing was so nervous it almost slipped – the crown, I mean – that the Queen dropped her handkerchief. Those English girls just stood there and looked at it, or were watching the Coronation, so Swing, who was nearest, picked it up and gave it to her and made her a little curtsy – one she had learned from a French governess when she was just a child – and the Queen gave her the sweetest smile, although right after it I could see she was looking a little puzzled, poor dear. I mean, after all, she was sure she knew all the maids of honour, and there we were, you see, but in the sort of glittery light in the Abbey, our tiaras looked just as real as the others, and I thought I heard the captain fizzing a little

Well, then there was a lot more ceremony and praying, and I really thought it would never end, and it was really very touching to see the lords paying homage to the King, and while it was all going on, I noticed a really wonderful-looking man in the most gorgeous uniform, standing right near us, and he had all kinds of glittering stars on his chest and things hung around his neck, and I recognised the gentleman who had been behind us when we entered the Abbey, only he was looking sort of pale and worn and terribly tired, and once I thought he seemed to sway a little, and so I whispered and asked him if he was all right, and he said ‘Oh, yes, quite. Quite all right, my dear’

But he wasn’t at all, and I had a sudden inspiration and said ‘Are you hungry?’

He whispered ‘Starved, my child. Been up all night, you know. Forgot to eat. Silly of me’

‘Would you care for a sandwich?’

'Would I care for a sandwich? Good Lord, child, you don't mean to tell me you have a sandwich?'

So I kicked Swing a little, and she gave me the pin she had brought along for the purpose, and I picked the threads of one of the panniers in my dress and got it open and sneaked him a cheese sandwich all nicely done up in waxed paper, and he almost swooned when he felt it in his hand, and then he sort of backed around behind a pillar, and when he returned he was looking much better, and he whispered 'God bless you, my child I don't know who you are, but you are obviously an angel dispatched by Heaven I say, might I send a friend? Poor Crommartin is worse off than I was Would you have another?'

I said, by all means, and when he wanted to know how we would recognise the friend, Swing said out of the corner of her mouth. 'Tell him to say you said he was O K'

So after a while a tall thin man, in really the most gorgeous velvet cloak I've ever seen, backed over and said 'One, two, three, four, five from the end Righto, the little one with the light-brown hair I say, my dear, Buckminster said I was O K'

So we gave him a sandwich, and he hardly waited to get behind a pillar to eat it, poor dear, he was so hungry, and, of course, he had a friend, so we fed all we could, until our sandwiches were gone, and one of them had to do homage to the King, and he knelt there for the longest time, and everybody thought he was trying to swallow his emotion, but he wasn't, he was trying to swallow the last of our sandwich before he spoke his piece, and I was so nervous for fear he wouldn't get it down, I nearly died

Well, they finally got around to crowning the Queen, and I was simply petrified I'd do the wrong thing, but we just watched the other maids of honour - I mean the real ones - and did what they did and stood where they stood, and there really wasn't anything for us to do, because there were four peeresses who held a sort of gold awning over her, though Swing and I were ready to step in and grab it if they dropped it, because they didn't look any too certain, the way they held it, and really the whole thing went off beautifully, except just as that love of an Archbishop of Canterbury put the ring on the Queen's finger and started to say 'Receive this ring, the seal of a sincere faith——' Swing got the hiccups, and the Archbishop turned right around and looked at her, and it frightened Swing, but not enough

Well, just as the Archbishop went to take the crown off the altar to crown the Queen, there was the most awful silence in the Abbey - I mean you couldn't hear anything except, of course,

Swing's hiccup – and I'm sure it was the most awful moment of my life, except one night at a hockey game in Chicago when a Yale boy in our party fell right out of our box on to the ice, and both teams skated right over him, and Captain Fizz had evidently made up his mind to end it all and kill Swing first, because I saw him sidling towards us, around in back, with murder in his eye, and, luckily, Swing saw him, too, and it frightened her so she stopped the hiccups, and the Archbishop crowned the Queen.

So after the Coronation part was over and the procession reformed, we thought perhaps we had better not go with them any more, so we just went part of the way to where we had met them in the first place, and then cut down one of the cross aisles, because we had seen a door at the end of it, only we weren't quite fast enough, because Swing's heel got caught in her dress and nearly threw her, and Captain Fizz came after us, and we could see that he was still simply furious, so we just picked up our skirts and ran as fast as we could, with Captain Fizz right in back of us, and we did get through the door and out into the street, but there were soldiers on either side, forming a lane, and police behind them, so we couldn't turn off, and Captain Fizz was fizzing and breathing right on our necks, and there was a carriage drawn up at the door, and we were so absolutely panic-stricken we just ran to it and opened the door and jumped in, just as Captain Fizz said 'Got you!' Only he hadn't.

Because, you see, there was this enormous coloured man sitting in the carriage – I mean he was really very handsome – and he was dressed in the most beautiful golden cloak I've ever seen in my life, and he had a gold thing sort of like a pagoda on his head, and gold chains around his neck, and a lot of stars and medals besides, and when Captain Fizz yanked open the door of the carriage, he leaned forward and said in just the softest voice

'Iss something wrong?'

Well, I've never seen anything in my whole life like the look on poor Captain Fizz's face, he was simply mauve with wrath, but he had to step back and salute, and while he was saluting and saying 'I beg your pardon, Your Highness,' the carriage drove off.

So that was how we saw the procession after the Coronation. I mean that is how we were in the procession, since we really were, because we were in the carriage of the Ambeok of Negotora, Sultan of Amu Penang, and, of course, he was a savage, though he spoke the most wonderful English, because he had been educated at Oxford, but he was a perfect dear, and he said he was so glad to see us, because he had thought he was going

to have to take that long ride over the Coronation route all by himself, and wouldn't think of us leaving, and he told us all about himself and all his wives and his jewels, and it was such a relief really to find someone who had more chips than our families, and we told him all about Chicago and being debutantes, and about our parties, and he was quite fascinated, and said he would like to come to Chicago sometime and visit us, and Swing said 'Yes, do,' and he had a golden stick with a sort of a fringe and little golden tassels on the end of it, and it seems it was his royal fly-swatter, and Swing offered to work it for him, and he was so pleased, not that there were any flies, but he was used to being where there were and just liked to have it worked anyway

The streets were just packed with people, and when we drove down the Embankment past thousands and thousands of school-children, they all cheered, and the Ambeok taught us how to bow to the plaudits of the multitude. Really we've never made such a hit - I mean even our families would have been proud of us if they could have seen - and we were just hoping that some of our Chicago friends would recognise us - I mean we really had something there, what with the Ambeok grinning and bowing, and Swing patting him on the neck every so often with the royal fly-swatter, and me waving graciously - they simply would have died

We were a great success on Oxford Street and at the Marble Arch, and going through Hyde Park I suggested to Swing if she didn't feel we ought to be thinking about going soon, because we were headed right back towards Buckingham Palace, where we were almost sure to run into Captain Fizz, who obviously didn't like us, and maybe the Sultan could drop us off somewhere and we would get a taxi home, but Swing was having such fun working the fly-swatter and improving her technique - she said she was just beginning to develop a backhand - that she simply wouldn't think of it, so we kept right on, and going through the arch on Constitution Hill, the Sultan asked Swing to marry him and promised to make her his number-one wife, and Swing, who is a dreamy sort of girl, said she would consider it, and then the dear, who was really so polite, asked me to marry him, too, so that we could go on being together and teach his women how to be debutantes

Anyway, we promised to look him up at the Savoy, where he was stopping, and have a glass of sherry with him, and the carriage stopped at Buckingham Palace, and we said good-bye and he went inside, and there we were on the sidewalk and no

taxi in sight, just as we walked right into the arms of Captain Fizz

I nearly died He fizzed furiously for a moment, and then took us each by the arm, saying 'Aha! Dashed well knew I'd find you Unauthorised presence in the Abbey Interfering with the Coronation You won't get away this time'

'We didn't interfere,' said Swing 'We helped Stop pinching'

'Not pinching,' said Captain Fizz 'Going to turn you over to the police Dashed cheek Just like Americans'

'I'm going to trip him,' Swing whispered to me 'You run' But before she could do it, another state coach drew up and stopped, and the handsome grey-haired man to whom we had fed the sandwich stepped out He saw us and came right over and said 'I say, Fitzwarrine, what's all this?'

Swing whispered 'I knew his name would have something with a fizz in it'

The captain didn't salute this time But he straightened up and said 'Caught them, Your Grace Unauthorised entry into the Abbey Joining in the Coronation procession Interfering with the Coronation Going to hand them over to the police Teach these dashed Americans a lesson Can't come over here and mix in our Coronation We don't go over there and join in their Inauguration'

The old gentleman addressed as 'Your Grace' looked at us for a moment and then said 'They're angels, Fitzwarrine There's been some mistake They're angels They gave me a sandwich when I was starving Crommartin had one, too, and Trevelyan . . . You haven't another one, have you?' This last he said to me

Fitzwarrine fizzed a little and then said 'Sorry, sir Duty. Unauthorised presence in the Abbey False ticket Dangerous characters, probably No other alternative but to hand them over'

The nice old gentleman looked at us again, and smiled and said 'My dears, who are you?'

I said 'We're débutantes from Chicago'

'I'm Janet Pierce,' said Swing, 'and this is Audrey Westmar. And you can send us both to jail if you want to, and we'll tell how we were swindled trying to buy a ticket to the Coronation. And I want to notify the London office of Harriman Pierce Stores'

'Eh?' said Fitzwarrine 'Eh? Harriman Pierce? Oh, I say Not Harriman Pierce's daughter Oh, I say, how awkward! How very awkward!'

'Very awkward for you!' said the old gentleman, who seemed to be enjoying something, to Fitzwarrine

'I say,' said Fitzwarrine 'Now I'm dashed if I know what to

do Most embarrassing Duty and all that. Unauthorised presence in Abbey Ought to hand you over'

'Well,' said Swing, who has an uncanny way of knowing when she is going to come out on top, 'why don't you?'

'It's all very well to say why don't you,' said Fitzwarrine, 'but it puts me in a dashed peculiar position. You see, I'm Lord Eilton'

Well, of course, as soon as he said that, I knew we had something, because Swing knows an awful lot about her father's business, and Lord Eilton was the chairman of the board of the English subsidiary of the Harriman Pierce Stores, and besides, he owned several large factories in Manchester and the Harriman Pierce Stores bought just scads of things from him

So then the nice old gentleman we had fed in the Abbey turned out to be the Duke of Buckminster, the King's uncle, and a perfect darling, and he finally said 'See here, Fitzwarrine, supposing I post-authorise the presence of these two young ladies in the Abbey Will that relieve you? Blessed if I ever want to have a Coronation again without them. You're sure you haven't another sandwich anywhere about you, my dear?'

Well, that just fixed everything, and Captain Fizz - I mean Lord Eilton - was plenty relieved, and he really is a love when you get to know him and he hasn't got a Coronation on his mind, because it turned out he was something dreadfully official at this one, and he took us through the lines and got us a car and sent us home, but not before he invited us to be in his box at the Coronation Ball at the Albert Hall the next evening and talked a lot about hands across the sea, and I am sure he is going to ask Swing to marry him - everybody does - and if he does, I hope she'll tell him she's engaged to the Ambeok of Negotora, Sultan of Amu Penang, but anyway, I've never met so many sweet people in all my life, and we did see the Coronation for practically nothing and with no trouble at all, and yet a lot of people we met afterwards told us they couldn't even get near to see the procession

The Roman Kid

This, I would say, was an example of a bad story grafted on to a good idea, but I have included it in this volume for a number of reasons, one of them being that it was selected for Anthony Boucher's ANTHOLOGY OF GREAT AMERICAN DETECTIVE STORIES. At the time I was writing it I didn't know that I was writing a detective story

Every student of writing, particularly those anxious to crack the American fiction market, should know how to write a formula story. In THE ROMAN KID I should say the mechanics of this art are so glaring that it is hardly possible to miss the turning of the wheels and the wheels within wheels. This particular formula is the famous one used to describe most American fiction stories in three sentences 'Boy meets girl. Boy loses girl. Boy gets girl' and you will see that so conscious was I of this cliché during the composition and telling of this story that I called attention to it myself in the ending.

And while the romance of THE ROMAN KID is the purest U.S.A. brand escape stuff, the basic idea of it is founded upon fact and one that you could verify for yourself the next time you are in Rome if you will go to the Museo delle Terme near the old Thermal Baths and ask to see the statue known as the Sitting Boxer.

This is a life-size bronze of a bearded Roman gladiator. He is wearing a Roman version of the boxing glove, an iron cestus laced to his hands with leather thongs, criss-crossing his forearms to the elbow. He has a cauliflower ear, the boxer's trade mark, a bashed-in nose and face and arms portraying numerous cuts and bruises, extraordinarily vivid delineations of the damage that can accrue to a fighter during the course of a rough evening, particularly when the mittens are made of iron instead of leather.

The sketch from which the sculptor moulded the original clay must have been made in the dressing-room immediately after a bout.

I first encountered the Sitting Boxer in 1933 when I visited Rome to negotiate with the Italian Government for a team of Italian amateur boxers to come to the U S A for an international amateur boxing match with the championship New York Golden Gloves team I spent a considerable amount of time in research in libraries, museums and the American Academy on what passed for sport in ancient Rome

At this time I had the good fortune to make the acquaintance of Prentice Duell, the Harvard archaeologist and painter Professor Duell, a brilliant, tough and most un-Professor-like young man was so kind as to guide me in my research work and we formed a lasting friendship Together we went to Tarquinia to study frescoes on the walls, to the Etruscan tombs many of them reflecting the sporting proclivities of the one-time occupiers, we visited Roman stadia, the Colosseum and the Circus Maximus, and it was he who took me to the Terme Museum to see the statue of the Sitting Boxer

The statue had only recently been excavated at that time and not much was known about it or the sculptor It was thought possibly to have been one of a group and there was also a theory that this was a representation of the boxing king of a Greek island who forced anyone landing on his island to try conclusions with him

Now, to a sports editor and veteran boxing writer who had seen many hundreds of professional and amateur fights and boxing matches, the statue and the condition of the old pugilist's face and arms and body spoke volumes Every muscle, his attitude, his hands, the battered ears, and the marks on his features told their story, a story that anyone who had spent as many hours as I at the ringside and in the dressing-rooms of fighters before and after matches could read

For days I had been sitting literally at Duell's feet, popeyed at his erudition and knowledge of antiquity, drinking in the wisdom he had excavated from the ages Now for the first time I was confronted with a situation where I knew a lot of things he didn't know, and the temptation to show off to him a little was too great to resist With somewhat studied casualness I said

'Well now, I can't tell you anything about the period to which it belongs or the artist who made it, but I can tell you a little about the big guy himself, what he was like and how he fought, and maybe even something about the chap who mussed him up For one thing he was a southpaw'

'A what,' said Professor Duell startled

'A southpaw - side winder - a left-hander'

'How do you know?' Prentice asked

'Why it's perfectly clear,' I said 'Look here,' and I showed him

The results were even more than I had hoped for and in a moment Professor Duell was most satisfactorily playing Watson to my Sherlock Holmes. Some of my deductions may have been far-fetched, but they were all logical and probable and consistent with the law of the prize-ring and my experience. All of these deductions you will find in THE ROMAN KID

I was tremendously impressed with myself and afterwards we hastened to the bar of the Ambasciatori for some old-fashioneds. After the third the Professor swore that some day he would put my revelations regarding the Sitting Boxer into a book on archaeology, and after the fourth I swore that I would return the compliment and put Professor Duell likewise into a book. He kept his promise. So have I.

It wasn't until five years later, while I was working as a feature writer for International News Service and wanted passage money to get back to England in the spring, that I thought of using the idea of the Sitting Boxer in a short story.

The hero, Tommy Thompson the sports writer who works for the 'Daily Blade,' is obviously autobiographical, but physically I made him into a friend of mine, the late Edward Neale the sports writer for the 'Associated Press.' Neale had resigned as a sports writer to go to Spain as a war correspondent. He was killed by a shell while reporting the civil war, the first of many famous newspaper reporters and war correspondents to die in this fashion. I envied Eddie when he left on this assignment. I was saddened when he was killed.

THE ROMAN KID

'Bon giorno,' said Tommy Thompson 'Ubi est the——' he paused and then concluded that he had made sufficient concession to what he thought was the Italian language, and finished 'Could a guy take a gander at the Tertullian Fragment?'

The girl at the desk of the Antiquity Room of the Museo Romano flinched a little and then cocked her bright head to one side and repeated slowly, with a reflective pause after each word

'Could - a - guy - take - a - gander - guy - take - gander Gander is the male of goose' She stopped and looked at Tommy with the corners of her mouth drawn down and a sort of despair in her eyes

Tommy suddenly realised that she had a face of infinite humour, and that the humour somehow managed to disguise its beauty, or rather made you less conscious of it Unlike the Italian women to whom he had already grown accustomed during his short sojourn in Rome, she had masses of soft hair, the colour of early morning sunlight, large light-blue eyes, and a small nose But Tommy felt that here was a person with whom one instinctively wanted to laugh So he laughed

'Excuse it please,' he said 'Maybe I ought to talk English My Italian is terrible I wanted to get a squint at that fragment of manuscript by the first Roman boxing writer I read a piece about it in the *Paris Herald* They're supposed just to have dug it up and it's the only existing description of an early boxing match Some Greek fed a Roman plenty of left hands and stopped him . . .'

The girl shook her head and said plaintively 'Why did they not teach to me the right kind of English?' Her mouth was thin, wide, mobile, and slightly pathetic She was tiny and dressed in a long, blue smock 'I have taken very high marks in English, but it is the wrong kind You are an American Are you an archaeologist?'

'Who, me? Jiminy, no' Tommy grinned again He was a pleasant-looking man in his late twenties with a broad, wide-open face and a strange two-inch patch of grey that ran through his dark hair from front to back 'I'm a sports writer You know - boxing, baseball, and stuff I do a column on the *Blade* in New York But I'm a sucker for this ancient history I'm supposed to be collecting a team of Italian amateur boxers to take back to fight our Golden Glovers, but I've been spending most of my time trying to find out what sports were like in ancient Rome Very tough If they had any columnists in those days, they buried 'em deep.'

The girl gazed at him, her face alive with intense interest. Finally she said flatly 'Americans are wonderful people Come. I show you.'

She led him down an aisle between massive bronzes and pieces of ancient frescoes to a small alcove where there was a little pedestal holding up a flat glass frame. Under the glass was a small triangle of stained brown manuscript that looked like a piece of old rag It was six inches across the top and about four

down one side Tommy could discern faintly the black brush characters on it

'That,' said the girl, 'is the Tertullian Fragment'

Tommy stared at it and then said 'Oh oh! I knew there'd be a catch to it It's in Latin, isn't it?'

The thing Tommy liked about the girl was that she didn't crack An American girl would have said 'What did you expect it would be in, eight-point Bodoni, with subheads?'

Instead she said gently 'I will translate it for you' She leaned over the case, her eyes shining with interest and concentration, and read slowly in her fine, precise English with the slight accent that Tommy had not yet placed

Falernus, the Senator, in his accusations, pointed to the scandal of the Emperor [Titus, the girl explained] who saved the life of Smistrus his defeated boxer because of his love for Aula, the sister of the vanquished gladiator All Rome, he said, knew that Smistrus deserved to die because by his defeat at the hands of the Greek, Phustra, a small but nimble boxer, who by the quickness of eye and hand and the agility of his legs remained uninjured during the combat, while inflicting many wounds upon his taller, stronger, opponent, the Emperor's gladiator drew the laughter of the multitude, thus bringing discredit upon the purple. Nevertheless the Emperor, with a glance at the box of the patrician Reglus, where sat the girl Aula, and in the face of the tumult of the mob demanding death for Smistrus, who lay bleeding from many wounds as well as exhausted by his efforts, signified that his life should be spared These matters, declared Falernus, were common knowledge

The girl stopped and looked up 'It ends there,' she said

'Gee,' said Tommy 'The little guy just stepped around and popped him A sort of a Fancy Dan I'll bet it was a lousy fight I never saw one of those that wasn't Maybe it was a splash Titus sends his man into the tank and then coppers on the bets There was a dame angle in those days too, eh? Gosh, you know, you're wonderful You translated that at sight'

'Perhaps,' said the girl, 'you will return the compliment and translate for me too'

'I apologise,' said Tommy 'I didn't mean to be rude. Whenever I start to talk fight, I fall into that jargon They were funny guys, those old reporters They didn't care a hang about the sports and never wrote about them unless there was some political angle to it - like this guy Tertullus I guess when your space was limited and there weren't any printing presses, you had to stick to things that were important. Nobody seems to

know much about what a show was really like at the Colosseum because nobody ever wrote about them I guess they just stuck up a copy of the results and the box score somewhere in the Forum and let it go at that'

A tall, stoop-shouldered man came through a door that opened from a small office at the rear of the little alcove, and spoke to the girl in German. He was grey-haired, grey-faced, and weary-looking. He wore a gold pince-nez attached to a black ribbon. The girl answered him and then turned to Tommy. "This is my father, Professor Lisschauer, the curator of the museum. Papachen, this is an American gentleman who is interested in the sports of antiquity."

Tommy shook hands. "Thompson is my name, sir. *The Blade*, New York Sports writer. Your daughter was kind enough to translate the fragment for me."

The old man had a pronounced accent. He said, "Ja, ja. Leni haff just tolt me. You do not read Greek and Latin?"

Tommy shook his head. "I—I'm afraid what little education I have, I got the hard way. I mean I had to go to work when I was a kid."

The old man looked at him puzzled and then glanced sharply at his daughter.

"Then how can you be a student of antiquitation? It iss impossible."

Tommy felt uncomfortable. There was a detachment about the professor that shut him out completely. He did not want to be shut out. He tried to explain.

"I—I'm trying to get the feel of things. I mean the people of those days and what they were like. Behind all these inscriptions and statuary and stuff there were people—you know, human beings. They couldn't have been such a lot different from us. That fighter, for instance, I saw in one of those wall paintings in Tarquinia, squared off with his thumb stuck out ready for a left lead to the eyeball. You could just see him getting ready to say, "Excuse me, pal," and then cross the right while the other guy is still blinking. He must have been the Gentleman Jones of Etruria. Gentleman Jones is a light heavy we have around New York. Polite, smooth, and very sporting in the ring, but he loves to stick that thumb in the other guy's eye. What I mean is maybe those old-time sports were just like that."

Professor Lisschauer looked baffled, shook his head, and said, "The reading of the ancients requires years of study." He sighed. "And then sometimes it iss nod enough. You are wasting your time. You will excoose me please."

He turned and shambled away His daughter watched him go
On her face was pain and concern

'Gee,' said Tommy, 'did I say something? I guess I'm just a dumb cluck I didn't mean—'

The girl shook her head There was a brightness in her eyes.
Tommy saw that they were close to tears 'Papachen iss in some trouble That is all He did not wish to be impolite He thinks only of his work Ach, if I could only help him . . '

'Is it anything serious? I mean is there anything I could—'

Leni smiled 'You are kind I am afraid you would not understand His integrity His years of hard work And then to lose everything' She stopped 'Forgive me It iss private trouble I should not bore you'

She hesitated and then suddenly asked. 'Have you seen the famous statue of the *Resting Boxer*? It iss in the Museo delle Terme' She raised her head proudly with a significance that Tommy did not understand at the time 'It iss a discovery of my papa'

'I haven't,' said Tommy 'But I will Do you suppose you—I mean, would you go along with me some time, to—to—'

'Take—a—gander—at it?' finished Leni.

'The once-over,' said Tommy.

'The once-over,' repeated Leni

'A quick peek—'

'A quick peek'

'You're on'

'You're on Does that mean yes?' Leni asked

'Yes'

'Yes You're on'

Their laughter joined and echoed from the quiet caverns of the museum They took each other's hands on it Something told Tommy that this was not the time to kiss her But there was nothing to stop him from wanting to

They met two days later, on a bright, clear, warm spring Sunday, and went to Alfredo's, where Tommy, entranced, watched Alfredo's showmanship as he manipulated the Fetuccini in the melted butter, and later they ate his famous sole in white-wine sauce and exchanged bits of information about their lives

The Lisschauers were Viennese Leni's father, a famous archaeologist, was the curator of the Museo Romano Leni herself had studied with him for many years

'Gee,' said Tommy 'I knew there was something My mother came from Vienna My father was an American And you can read the past as though it were a book And yet you're sweet and

simple I've never met anyone like you Shut up, Thompson, you're ga-ga!

'Ga-ga?' said Leni.

'Soft in the head,' explained Tommy, and then added under his breath 'about you,' continuing aloud 'You must learn our beautiful language I'll teach you if you'll help me with my ancient history'

Leni looked at him curiously with her large eyes 'You are a strange boy, are you not? You write about the sports and you are interested in antiquity I thought Americans only cared about to make money'

'I love it,' confessed Tommy - 'making money, I mean, but I don't let it get me down What do you like to do besides read old Latin manuscripts at sight?'

'Oh,' said Leni, thinking seriously and counting on the fingers of one hand, 'I like to dance, to play tennis, to ski, to . . .'

'That's done it,' interrupted Tommy 'There's a tea dance at my hotel at five What do you say we go and step?'

Leni nodded her head violently in assent They toasted each other in *Lacrima Cristi* on that .

They kept meaning to go to the Museo delle Terme all through the afternoon But there was such a fine blue Roman sky and the smell of flowers in the air - Tommy could not be sure whether it was flowers or Leni, who was dressed in a simple white frock with a little girl's sash at the waist, and a big straw hat - and also they acquired a cab-driver named Pietro Dandolo whose fine brown horse was named Ginevra Pietro sang snatches of operatic arias as he drove - sang them very quietly to himself. And although it was warm, he still wore his rusty blue coat and shoulder cape and battered silk hat, and he sang his orders to Ginevra instead of speaking them, which was why Tommy and Leni grew to love him Tommy engaged him for the whole day

He drove them through the Porta Pinciana and the fragrance of the Borghese gardens to the Plaza de Popolo From there they crossed the Tiber over the Ponte Margherita and went rolling along the muddy river past the Castel Sant' Angelo, and the Salviati and Corsini palaces It seemed so natural that all the time Leni's hand should be in Tommy's, and their fingers intertwined

Tommy told Leni something about himself and the curious life he lived in New York - the constant round of prizefights, baseball games, golf and tennis matches At fifteen he had had to quit school and start in as an office boy in the sports department of the *Blade* His father had been a singing teacher who had been

ruined by the depression Tommy's education had been continued by his father to the best of his ability. He had a talent for writing and had become sports editor and columnist and lived in an atmosphere of athletes, competition, and sweat. But in Tommy too there was a reaching for beauty, and a sensitivity to human beings and what made them tick. The bright girl at his side was stirring a yearning in him, one that he felt unable to express, except in the curious language of his life and his trade. On her part, the girl was fascinated by the strangeness of this American, his vitality and animation, but with her feminine intuition she already felt the hungry, incompleted side of his nature and was drawn to it.

They recrossed the Tiber by the Ponte Palatino and drove back through the wonderful, shining city, past the great Victor Emmanuel monument and the Palazzo Venezia to the Ambassadors, where they went down to the little café below and danced Viennese waltzes and Tommy taught Leni American slang and she came to look with a fond joy for the wide grin that spread over his face when he interpreted.

'You're the tops. Get it?' It means there was never anybody like you ever before. You're the number-one gal.'

Leni repeated after him solemnly. 'I - am - the - tops.'

'Here's another one. "Carrying the torch. When you're crazy about someone - like "Baby, am I carrying the torch for you!" Get it?'

'I get it,' said Leni, copying Tommy's intonation exactly. 'Can I carry the torch for you too, or is the torch only for gentlemen?'

The whirling waltzes and the unity that comes from the perfect matching of rhythm and movement finished them. By the time they went to the famous Ulpia restaurant, hard by the Trajan Forum, for dinner, they were in love. They sat close together in the damp cool of the grotto below with the magic upon them, their hands tightly clasped, listening to the little orchestra, the guitars and mandolins and the blind violinist with the wonderful throbbing tone. The old grotto was carved out of the tufa of the buildings of the Forum. Dim lanterns faintly showed the garlands of spring flowers, the hanging basket bottles of Chianti, and the bits of old marbles and pieces of ancient friezes.

Tommy said. 'Gee, Leni, I've got a nerve to spring this on you this way, but I can't help it. I'm going for you. I've never gone for a gal this way in my life. Do - do I have to translate that for you too?'

Leni took Tommy's hand and held it to her cheek and shook her head that way, holding it. She said simply and directly. 'Oh,

strange, American Tommy I am afraid that I going for you too.

'I want to kiss you,' said Tommy, flatly 'Would anybody care?'

Leni looked at him with her eyes dancing like wood sprites 'This is Rome,' she said 'The old gods would like it very much'

They kissed each other They kissed each other again until the sweetness was no longer bearable 'Oh gee,' said Tommy, 'I heard the gods cheering

'I did too,' said Leni, 'only I think it was Benedetto'

Benedetto, the enormous proprietor, waddled over to the table with a bottle of wine He said 'Bravo! Bravo! Signor, signorina, permit me, the compliments of the Ulpia'

'Looka,' said Tommy, after they had drunk a toast with Benedetto, 'let's get this straight now I love you I'll never love anybody but you I want to marry you But quick I want to take you back to New York with me I never want you out of my sight from now on'

Leni took his hand and said. 'Oh, Tommy. I think perhaps I want to also so much

And then the dancing went out of her eyes and she caught her breath sharply and let go of Tommy's hand He could see that something inside her had gone lumpy

'Oh oh——' he said 'Trouble What is it, Leni? Is there another guy?'

The girl suddenly was frightened and a little panicky 'Oh, Tommy—I should not have let myself go so It iss so different with us here It has been understood for so long that I will be the wife of Professor Zanni He is Papa's associate I know that Papachen wishes it And we here are different with our families. Papa is everything He would not understand you And just now, when he is in such deep trouble Oh, Tommy, I shall die . '

Tommy spoke a little grimly 'I get it When I walk into Madison Square Garden or Twenty-one, I'm a big shot, but in this set-up Mr Thompson of the New York *Blade* is just John Mugg' He paused, and when he caught Leni looking baffled again, said 'Never mind, sweet, that's one I didn't want you to understand Look, what is the trouble your dad's in? Tell me about it, Leni'

Leni said 'Oh, Tommy,' again, and then replied. 'It is about the statue of the *Resting Boxer* The one—the one we did not see Papa discovered it near the Fosso delle Tre Fontane It was his great discovery It is one of the most perfect bronzes ever found Papa has written that it is in the style and manner of the

sculptor Præxus in the time of the Emperor Titus Mussolini made Papa a Commendatore because the statue is of the Golden Age of Rome

'And so—'

'And so a Professor Guglielmo in Napoli has published a paper on the statue, against Papa. He is a very important man in archaeology. He has written that the statue is—how do you say?—a—'

Tommy whistled 'I get it. A phony.'

'Is false. Is a fraud. Three years ago the Manzini brothers were put into jail because they had made and buried many statues that were—that were phony, as you say. Now they are both dead. Professor Guglielmo has written that the statue my father has discovered is a fraud of the Manzini brothers.'

'Well, isn't your dad's word as good as his?'

'Guglielmo is an important man in Italy. He is high in the party. And we are Austrians. And proof? What is there but that which Papa has from his years of study, from his knowledge?'

Tommy chewed on his lower lip. 'And unless he can prove he's right, he loses his job. Nice. This guy you're supposed to marry. Where does he figure in this set-up?'

Leni frowned. 'He is terribly unhappy. He is afraid that Professor Guglielmo may be right.'

'Just a pal,' said Tommy. 'And if your father goes out, he goes in.'

'Oh, Tommy,' cried Leni, 'how did you know?'

'It's got a familiar ring to it, sweet.' Tommy sighed. 'At this point, enter our hero. And what does he do? He does nothing. On account of he's just a dumb sports writer. It's a fine plot, up to there.'

'Plot, Tommy?'

'Mmmm. Boy loves girl. Girl's father does not love boy. In fact, he does not know boy exists. Girl's father is in jam. Buckety, buckety, here comes boy on a white horse, rescues father. Father says "Bless you, my children." Boy gets girl. Only this one has me stopped. Cold. As a hero I'm just a columnist. Let's get out of here, Leni, and go for a drive. I want to cool my head off.'

They filled their pockets with sugar for Ginevra, the horse. Pietro Dandolo was sitting on the box singing the 'M'appari' aria from *Martha* to himself, so they fed Ginevra until he had finished and then got in. Pietro said something in Italian to Leni and started off.

'Where is he going?' asked Tommy. 'Not that it matters on a night like this.'

'He says because there is so big a moon, he is driving us to the Colosseo'

The indeed so big moon shone through the skeleton of the Colosseum and illuminated the simple white cross erected on the spot where the Christian martyrs died. Leni and Tommy wandered in through the main entrance, their arms about each other's waist, picking their way around the pieces of fallen pillars and slabs of tufa and marble cornices. The great shell of the ancient arena was deserted except for the many huge Colosseum cats who lived there. Sometimes the moonlight picked up their eyes and made them glitter. The shadows seemed alive with their slinking figures, and sometimes their shapes were outlined, sitting on the long, broken columns.

Leni and Tommy sat close together on a drum-shaped slab of broken pillar and soaked in the feel of the place, the ancient quiet, and the beauty of the rising tiers of tumbled stone and the silhouettes of the arches.

Leni began to speak in her soft, expressive voice. 'There, in the centre, is the box where the Emperor sat. There was a great purple cloth that hung from it. The patricians and the Senators were in the near-by boxes, according to their rank. In that little gallery above sat the courtesans. The plebs, the common people, were up at the top.'

'The gallery boys,' said Tommy. 'I guess a chump had no more chance of getting a ringside seat at this show than a guy named plain Joe Doakes could crash the first five rows at a heavyweight championship fight at the Yankee Stadium.'

'On days when the sun was too hot, or there was rain, there was a great canopy erected that covered the whole arena like a roof, a canopy of many colours.'

Tommy grunted. 'We're civilised. We let our customers sit out in the rain at Palmer Stadium and the Yale Bowl.'

'They could let in water and cover the whole floor of the arena enough to stage sea battles, of which the Emperor was very fond. Have you seen the excavations at the other end? In the time of Titus the floor of the arena was many levels below this one. We are sitting on the dust of twenty centuries.'

'I looked at them. You know what they reminded me of? - The basement of Madison Square Garden, our big indoor arena in New York, at circus time. Runways for the animals, cages, dressing-rooms. And nobody really knows very much about the shows they put on here, or what it was like, do they, Leni? There is the Emperor's box. There sat the big shots, there the girls. There was a canopy. Men fought with weapons and with

their hands Christians and slaves and condemned prisoners were torn to pieces by wild animals And that's all'

Leni sighed 'It is all so long dead, Tommy One must be so careful of the records one reads into stones'

Tommy sprang up suddenly from the drum of the pillar and took a few steps into the arena The floor was white with moonlight, and the grey patch that ran through his hair looked like solid silver. He spread his arms wide with his fists clenched and shook them and cried 'But it isn't dead, Leni Can't you feel it? All the people There were people here Thousands of them. Human beings The place was alive with them What's two thousand years? They must have been just like us Leni, it drives me crazy I want to see them I want to bring this place to life'

He stopped suddenly, shoved his hands deep into his pockets, and began to pace, and the dark shapes of the cats scattered to the deeper shadows He spoke again 'This couldn't have been so different from what we know - World Series day, or fight night at the Polo Grounds, or the Harvard-Yale game at New Haven Crowds coming in to see the show, pushing and gabbing.

If you'll listen, you can hear the scrape of thousands of sandals on the ramps and that excited hum and chatter of a crowd going to a show You would hear snatches of conversation They must have talked in Roman slang as they went to their seats the same way we do - 'Who do you like tonight? What do you hear? I've got a good tip on the third prelim A new guy down from the north - they say he's a honey, fast and shifty - He's fighting for the Blues Is it true that Decius, or whatever he was called, is out of shape? They say he didn't train a lick. A wise guy I heard the main go was in the bag I got it from the inside Friend of mine who knows the guy who trains the gladiators I'm gonna have a couple of bucks riding on Drusus He's a house fighter Those guys haven't blown a decision yet . Pushing and shoving, and sweating, and laughing . '

Leni was standing too, now, her face pale, reflected from the white ball of the nearly full moon that now hung directly over the black shell of the old arena Her lips were parted with excitement She did not understand much of what Tommy was saying, but the feeling of it was reaching her 'Oh, Tommy. Please go on' - 'Crooks, gamblers, sports, pickpockets, actors, writers, just plain people out for fun, guys with their dolls, and the dolls dressed and made up to kill - I've seen their paint pots in the museums, big-shot gangsters, lawyers - Rome was lousy with lawyers, politicians, the regular fight crowd Why you can work right back from the numbers on the portals, Leni If they num-

bered the portals they must have had tickets that corresponded to the numbers'

'Yes - yes, Tommy They were made of bone, I think'

'Then they must have had ticket-takers and directors and ushers It was probably a political job Maybe they even had programmes—' he grinned suddenly, widely 'Can't you see the programme-sellers standing under those arches and on the ramps, and by the stairways hollering "Get your programmes here You can't tell the gladiators without a programme Names and numbers of the Christian martyrs"'

He threw up his head and gazed around the great amphitheatre to the entrance arcades 'And what about grub, and concessionaires? There never yet was a sports crowd that didn't get hungry and thirsty There must have been venders selling things to eat and drink What would the Roman equivalent have been of our hot dogs and peanuts and beer and pop?'

'Meat on a stick, probably,' said Leni, 'yes, and fruit .'

'They probably hollered just the same as ours "Get it red-hot here!" and wine—'

'The *vinaru*,' interrupted Leni, almost breathless, 'the wine merchants They carried it around in skins'

'Red wine and white Didn't they used to cart snow down from the mountains to cool it? "Ice-cold, ice-cold, ice-cold! Get your ice-cold *umo* here, ten cents a cup Who'll have a cup? Sweet or sour, sir?" Noise, cries, excitement, and maybe the mob up in the two-bit seats stamping their feet because they wanted the show to begin And the guys selling souvenirs "Show your colours" The blue and the white. Hawkers, with blue ribbons and white ones "Show your colours, folks What's your favourite?"'

'Oh, and little clay figurines of the gods,' breathed Leni, 'for the good luck'

'Sure And statuettes of the favourite gladiators to carry or tie to your tunic the way the gals who go up to New Haven for the Army-Yale game pin a little bulldog or Army mule to their coats'

'And girls selling garlands of flowers to throw into the arena to the victors,' Leni said 'There they stand, with flowers in their dark hair, and the garlands over their arms .'

Tommy put his arm around Leni's shoulder in glee and pointed to the vast floor of the arena "They had to get ready, didn't they? Set the arena for the show? There are the roustabouts - slaves, I suppose - marking off the combat areas, looking after the props, preparing the boxes of sand to cover up the bloodstains There'd

be the officials, and judges and referees and masters of ceremony, dressed up to kill and strutting like an A A U official in his hard hat at a big track meet. Officials are all alike. The crowd is sifting to its seats. People are visiting from box to box, laughing and making bets. Whistling breaks out from the top tiers as a gladiator comes out to try the footing and look at the direction of the sun so that if he wins the toss he can get it to his back. I guess man could whistle from the time he had a mouth.

'And can you get an idea of the dressing-rooms below? The taping and bandaging and last-minute advice to the fighters, and the swordsmen limbering up and doing knee flexes and lunges and making passes with their short swords, and the boxers shadow-boxing to warm up, the way every fighter has since guys first put up their dukes, and whistling their breath out of their noses as they punched at the air. And I guess maybe down in the dungeons the Christians were on their knees, quietly praying. And sometimes over the noise of the crowd and the cries of the candy butchers and wine-sellers and hawkers you would hear from deep down the impatient roaring of the beasts, the way sometimes when the circus is in the Garden and there is a sudden lull and you hear the lions from down below.'

Leni was crying. 'Oh, Tommy, Tommy, you have made this place of the long ago, so alive.' Her eyes were shining, and now she too stood with her head thrown back and her arms outstretched towards the slender white cross. 'These things were so. They were. Oh, they were.'

Suddenly she stopped short and spun around facing the man and cried sharply 'Tommy!' and again 'Tommy!'

Tommy was startled. There was such a strange look on her face. Her eyes were so wide. 'Sweet, what is it?'

The girl suddenly placed both hands to her temples and held them and spoke in German. '*Ach, lieber Herrje! Es ist nicht möglich - aber doch - doch—*'

'Honey, what's happened?'

Leni ran to him. 'Tommy, you must come with me at once. But at once. It is still early. You *will* come with me. I have had - oh how do you say it? Something inside of me, all through me.'

'Tommy held her off. 'Is it a hunch, honey?'

'Oh yes, yes, Tommy. Is that the word? Something inside of me that has told me something.'

'Do you want to tell me about it?'

Leni shook her head. 'N-no. Not yet. But you will come. . '

She took him by the hand and together they ran out of the

arena, frightening the cats again Pietro was so startled that he stopped in the middle of the Toreador song

'*Trenta, Via Palestro, e presto,*' ordered Leni. They scrambled into the carriage, and a surprised and startled Ginevra rattled them over the cobblestones and on to the smooth asphalt of the Via del Impero, at what, to the best of her recollection, was a gallop.

Leni said 'I do not want to say yet, Tommy. Just hold me, please.'

The address was a private house, not far from the Museo Romano. 'Our home,' Leni said. She still had Tommy by the hand as she rang the front doorbell. A pleasant-faced elderly woman in a black dress and white apron came to the door. Leni said breathlessly in German. 'Ach, Liesel. Is Papa still up?'

The woman replied 'He is not at home, Miss Leni. The Conte Alberini came. They both went away together. I believe they were to go to the Museo delle Terme.'

Leni wasted no time. She cried 'Come. Oh, if it is not too late. *Presto, Pietro al Museo delle Terme*. The little door on the Via Gernaia side.'

Ginevra, thoroughly outraged, clattered them past the huge grey Station Centrale, whipped them around a corner on two wheels and deposited them before a tiny iron door in a high, thick wall. Leni seized a bell pull and jangled a bell wildly and then pounded with her little fist so that the iron door rattled and clanged.

The door was finally opened by an ancient attendant in a faded blue uniform coat.

'I am Leni Lisschauer, Professor Lisschauer's daughter,' Leni said. 'Is my papa here?'

The attendant nodded. '*Sì, sì signorina*. It is a little irregular. We are closed. They are all on the second floor with the Conte Alberini. You may come.'

He had an old lantern, and by its dim rays he led them, Leni still clinging to Tommy's hand, through a garden in which were many shadowy statues, to the dark and gloomy museum built on the site of the old thermal baths. It grew lighter as they went up the stairs to the second floor. The room at the far end of the museum was illuminated and they heard voices coming from it.

Leni, still towing Tommy, broke into a little run. They burst into the room. The four men there turned and stared.

One of them was Professor Lisschauer. He looked very old. The second was tall and dignified, with a black beard and a

monocle With him stood a short, fussy, baldheaded little man wearing pince-nez attached to a black ribbon The fourth was a thin man with a narrow face and long black hair combed back from a high forehead

But the thing that caught Tommy's eye was not so much the men, but the great bronze on a marble pedestal in the centre of the room It was the figure of a naked man seated, his arms resting on upper legs, his hand encased in the iron-studded, hard-leather cesti worn by the ancient pugilists, with thongs extending halfway up to his elbows and ending in a tight leather cuff

His head was turned to the right looking up over his right shoulder He was curly-headed and bearded, heavy-muscled He had been through a terrific battering On his right shoulder and right elbow and in the criss-crossed thongs of the right forearm were three deep and gaping cuts His ears were cauliflowered, ballooned, and cut His nose had been smashed to one side and cut, his lips puffed, his cheekbone swollen and gashed. His eyes showed the heavy ridges of the professional prizefighter, and traces of old scars as well as new wounds The cesti, which were thick and about two and a half inches wide, covering the knuckles and letting the fingers protrude, had sharp cutting edges, and the two halves were held together around the hand with narrow strips of iron

The thin man with the lank black hair made a little movement towards Leni, but her father was the first to recover He spoke to her in German

'Leni! What are you doing here? Who is this man? Ah yes, he was at the museum I remember But why?' He stopped, turned to the group, and said in Italian 'Forgive me Count Alberini, I believe you have met my daughter Professor Guglielmo, my daughter Leni'

Leni introduced Tommy The bearded, monocled man was Count Alberini, State Director of Museums and Art, the fussy little baldheaded man was Guglielmo The thin, narrow-faced one with the long hair was Armando Zanni, Lisschauer's assistant Then she turned to her father 'Papachen - what has happened?'

'It is all over, my child Count Alberini has accepted the statement and the testimony of Professor Guglielmo The Manzini brothers were once known to have made a statue of a boxer Zanni has had no alternative but to agree with him I have given my resignation The Count has been very kind He brought Professor Guglielmo here from Naples to confront me and give me a last chance to prove my case I could not.'

Leni turned to Tommy quickly and translated what her father had said, in pain and in panic. The Count was coughing discreetly and then spoke softly and deprecatingly in English. 'Your pardon. But this is indeed a very private matter. This young man—' He looked inquiringly at Leni.

The girl turned. 'He is an expert—' She was very close to tears.

Professor Guglielmo removed his pince-nez and cocked his head to one side and asked 'Of antiquity?'

'No,' cried Leni, her young voice ringing bravely and defiantly through the room. 'No! Of life!' Suddenly she turned to Tommy and wailed. 'Oh, Tommy—Tommy! Do something! Make him live. Bring him to life for me the way you did the old people of the Colosseo. Tommy.'

Tommy caught her by the shoulders and said 'I get it. Keep your chin up. I get the picture.' He faced the group of men. 'Do all of you gentlemen understand English?'

They all bowed. Zanni said 'But naturally. It is a part of education.'

'Good,' said Tommy. 'Anything you don't understand Leni will translate for you. She's on to my jargon.' He grinned pleasantly at Zanni. 'Education sometimes has its limits. Leni, tell all these guys to keep their shirts on. I want five minutes with this old chap. Maybe I can help.'

He stepped out of the circle and walked slowly over to the statue while the four men and the girl stood watching him. He spoke to himself very slowly as he stood in front of the great bronze, his hands in his pockets, his head cocked a little to one side—

'The Roman Kid, eh? What a licking you took! Gee, shave off those whiskers, and you could be Paolino sitting on the rubbing table in the dressing-room at the Yankee Stadium after Max Schmeling got through with him. What a pasting! . . . That's a lovely pair of tin ears you've got, my friend. You just never bothered to duck, eh? Oh what a job—what a job! . . '

He commenced to circle the statue slowly, examining it minutely. He fingered the three cuts on the right side, went suddenly to the other side and examined the left arm, whistled, and said 'Oh oh, side-winder!' He inspected the hands carefully and then hopped up on to the pedestal, fingered and examined the cuts on the face, the bruises and abrasions and scars. He jumped down to the floor again, and suddenly fell into a boxing stance, looked at the statue again and changed it, and then walked rapidly around it again. Once he addressed himself to Count

Alberini 'These cuts,' he said, 'are definitely cuts? Not accidents? Ages of being buried, or being tossed around?'

'We do not believe it has been buried for ages,' the Count replied with a little smile, 'but the cuts and marks were all placed there by the sculptor'

'Thanks,' said Tommy 'That's all I wanted to know' He made one more circle around the statue and then backed away from it with a little gesture of salute and said 'Thanks, pal There's been many a guy since your time who's had his ears pinned back just the way yours were' He turned and faced the group, uttered something out of the corner of his mouth to Leni that sounded like 'Bucketty, bucketty,' and then said with a fine, studied, dramatic carelessness that delighted him 'Gentlemen, what would you like to know about this guy?'

It was old Professor Lisschauer who grasped at the straw He said 'What? Is there anything you can tell us?' There was deep despair in his voice, which made Tommy suddenly ashamed of his fine pose He dropped it

'Plenty,' he said grimly 'In the first place, the guy was a south-paw'

'A which?' inquired Professor Guglielmo politely

'Portsider He was left-handed I'll bet most guys hated to fight him Nobody likes to fight a southpaw'

Count Alberini looked interested 'So?' he said 'How do you determine this?'

'Looka,' said Tommy 'You can't miss it' He stepped up to the statue, took a pencil from his pocket, and used it as a pointer 'Here! Deep cut on right shoulder Another on the arm just below the elbow Another on the forearm inside the lacings No cuts on the left shoulder or arm whatsoever Here's how the orthodox boxer stands—' Tommy fell into the regular stance, left hand, left foot forward 'Here's how this guy stood—' He reversed his position and stood with his right foot forward, right arm extended and curled, left arm bent at his side 'Get it?' he said 'The reason he has those cuts on the right arm is because that is the part of him that was closest to his opponent'

For the first time light came back to Leni's face The Count solemnly walked over to the statue, inserted his monocle in his eye, inspected the three cuts one after another, assumed the left-handed boxing stance that Tommy had taken, straightened up, slapped his thigh and said '*Per Bacco*'

'Uhu!' said Tommy 'And anyway, the guy's had a busted left duke-hand, I mean That artist didn't miss a thing Here, you can see the swelling where it knitted badly He used the left for

the Sunday punch That would be the one most likely to go All right He wasn't a boxer He was a slugger All he wanted to do was to get in close enough to lay in that left - which meant curtains Get it?

Guglielmo walked over, adjusted his pince-nez, and said 'You can explain that?'

'Look at the ears on him,' said Tommy 'Guys who can box don't get marked up that way This guy's had a hell of a licking All those bums who take five to give one wind up with pretzel ears and scarred eyebrows He's got the musculature of a slugger too, and the legs Here, look at all these heavy muscles behind the shoulders and down the back, and on the arms The fast boxer and snap hitter has slender shoulders and tapering muscles And anyway, the cuts on the arm again tell you that Look here, professor, let me show you Square off in front of me'

He got Guglielmo in a boxer-like attitude The little old man seemed to like it and tried to look fierce and belligerent Tommy ranged himself opposite him in the left-handed stance, but with his right arm and fist completely extended in front of him, and the left cocked at his breast

'I can keep you off in this way But this guy fought with his right arm curled in front of his face like a shield as he shuffled in That's how he got those cuts where they are?'

Guglielmo practised a little, transformed himself into a slugger, examined the statue, went into a pose again, straightened up, looked at Alberini and said '*Mirabile!* *E vero*'

Leni clapped her hands 'Oh, Tommy, bravo!'

Professor Zanni shrugged his shoulders and said 'In the realm of pure conjecture . . .'

Tommy threw him a look, licked his lips, and spoke again 'Now if you'd like,' he said, 'I think I can tell you something about the guy who whipped him The sculptor who did this made his sketches in the dressing-room or in the arena, immediately after the fight Now—'

Zanni suddenly showed even, white teeth 'Just a moment, my friend How do you know he lost the fight? Perhaps he was the winner, no?'

'Zanni,' said Tommy, 'you ought to read a book. It'll broaden you Do you admit that he was sketched immediately after a fight?'

'If the statue were genuine, I would The artist has been so careful to include every mark with nothing omitted But he might still have been the winner'

'Then the sculptor would also have been careful enough to

include the victor's chaplet or garland which would have been on this guy's head if he'd won,' said Tommy with his most charming smile

'Bravo!' said Alberini and Guglielmo in unison

'*Herrlich!*' said Professor Lisschauer. He moved over towards Alberini and Guglielmo. There was a little gleam of hope in his tired eyes

'Thanks,' said Tommy. 'All right, then. The little guy who licked him was probably a Greek. He—'

It was Zanni who interrupted again with a laugh. 'Hah! No, no, no, my friend. That is now pure fancy. You have the true American imagination.'

'You sure root for the home team, don't you, Zanni?' Tommy said

'I do not understand this expression.'

'Leni does,' suggested Tommy. 'Maybe you've read a book, but not the right one. There's one over in the library of the American Academy. I can refer you to Professor Stoddard. He gave it to me. It tells how the Greeks never punched for the body. They were purely head punchers. This guy hasn't a mark on his body. But look at his kisser. The Greeks, from all I can find out, were much better boxers than the Romans. And make no mistake. The guy who gave the Roman Kid his pasting was a little sweetheart. He fought on a bicycle, and—'

Even Leni joined in the unison chorus. 'A bicycle?' They were all hypnotised.

Tommy grinned. 'Excuse me. That's one I haven't taught you yet, Leni. He fought in retreat. He knew he had to stay away from this guy or get killed.'

'Why do you say a small man?' asked Guglielmo.

'Figure it out,' replied Tommy. 'Small men are fast. Big guys are slow. This guy is still alive, isn't he? If his opponent had been a big, fast guy with a punch, he'd be dead instead of sitting there. You could cave in the side of a guy's head with one of those things he has on his hands. But the Greek was fast enough to keep away, and probably smaller. He either didn't have a punch or he was afraid to get close enough to let one go. And the direction of the cuts and bruises on the Kid's face indicate that the Greek hooked, or punched up at him, and therefore was smaller. Look at the condition of the right side of the Kid's face, compared to the left. The Greek probably let him have a few right-hand smashes when he had him woozy. But he was a smart little guy and he knew how to fight a southpaw, which is more than most of our fighters do today. He kept moving,

circling to his own left and the Kid's right, away from that deadly left hand, and as he circled and back-pedalled, he kept popping him with left hooks—look at the way his nose is bent, the size of his right ear, and the mess he made out of the right side of his face. Even so, he didn't want to risk getting close enough to finish him. He had the fight won, so why take a chance? He just popped him with that left until the southpaw collapsed from the accumulation of punches, loss of blood, and exhaustion. Afterwards—'

Leni suddenly placed her hand to her face and screamed.

Her cry echoed through the high, empty vaults of the deserted museum.

'Tommy! Tommy! Papa!' she was staring 'The Tertullian Fragment! The description Tommy! Papa!'

They were all talking and shouting at once, Alberini crying '*Corpe di Bacco*,' Guglielmo saying over and over '*Si, si, si, si, ma si, si-si*', and Professor Lisschauer '*Lieber Herr Gott Aber gewiss*'.

'I don't get it,' said Tommy.

'The Fragment!' cried Leni. 'The description of the boxing match before Titus!'

'Holy smokes!' said Tommy. 'I had forgotten it.'

'The name—The name!' cried Professor Lisschauer. 'Sinistrus, the Left-Handed One. It iss. It iss. You haff here before you Sinistrus, Roman boxer of the Emperor Titus, defeated by the little Greek, Phustra, and granted his life because of the love of the Emperor for his sister Aula.'

It was not strange that Leni and Tommy should be hugging each other, but it was a little unusual that Lisschauer and Guglielmo should be in each other's arms, and patting each other on the back, until the little man suddenly stepped back and cleared his throat and said 'I must have leave to speak. Count Alberini, Professor Lisschauer, I withdraw. I apologise. I have done a great injustice, though my intent was honest. I was wrong. The Manzini brothers have been dead two years. The Tertullian Fragment was discovered less than six months ago. They could not possibly have known of its contents. I hope that I will be forgiven. For my friend Professor Lisschauer I have the greatest esteem and admiration.'

The Count adjusted his monocle and said 'Professor Guglielmo, it is no more than I expected from a man of your attainments and generosity. The resignation of Professor Lisschauer is of course not accepted.'

Professor Lisschauer somehow made a magnificent job of not

seeing where Leni had just been. He came to Tommy and said 'I wish to thank you from the bottom uff my heart, and to make to you my apologies for my attitude and my ignorance in the museum that morning. We are all too far from the realities of life. You have shamed us all.'

Tommy said 'Gee - don't - it catches me in the throat. I'm - I'm just a dumb guy who happens to have been around fights and fighters all his life.'

There was a pause. 'I am so happy,' said Professor Lisschauer, 'I could to sing and cry. We will go to my house, all, and drink some wine. Mr Thomsen, Count Alberini, Guglielmo, Zanni.' He stopped. 'Where has gone Zanni?'

'Zanni,' said Tommy succinctly, 'has taken a powder.'

They all looked blank, but Tommy didn't explain. They moved off down the long aisles of glass cases and marbles and bronzes towards the stans. When they reached the darker portions and the attendant went ahead with his lantern, Tommy did what was requisite.

'You know,' said Leni, when she could speak again, 'I - I think perhaps boy is going to get girl . . .'

The Witch of Woonsapucket

People ask me frequently how I get ideas for stories. Sometimes I am ashamed to tell them because the genesis of the idea is frequently madder than the story itself. This happens to be the case with THE WITCH OF WOONSAPUCKET which was one of a series of business-golf stories I kept going in the 'Saturday Evening Post' over a period of years, all written around the personality and troubles of the advertising manager of a concern manufacturing golf equipment, an invented character.

The origin of this story goes back to the particular kind of noddy I am and the days when I was writing my sports column. I used to cover all the big golf matches, the National Open, the Amateur, the Women's, the P G A, and I had many personal friends among the golfers, men of whom I was genuinely fond, like Tommy Armour, Bobby Cruickshank, Bob Jones, Walter Hagen, Gene Sarazen, and many others.

I was never able to take my sports casually, but always rooted passionately for some individual or some team and suffered agonies when my side looked as though it might lose. I never bet a dime on any sporting event, with the occasional exception of a small wager on a nag, during my entire thirteen-year tenure in sports, but I always had a strong personal rooting interest in some team or contestant.

Well, one day (and this is where the narrative becomes embarrassing) I was following a golf match. If my recollection serves me, it was the Augusta Open Tournament, at Augusta, Georgia, and I was rooting this time for Walter Hagen, who was staging a comeback, to win it.

I was fond of Hagen. He was a friendly, uninhibited man loved by the sports writers for his faults as well as his virtues. He liked to live well and he was inclined to look upon the flowing bowl with honest thirst and friendly eye. He had not won a major tournament in too many years and there at Augusta it seemed as though he might crash back into the big time again. I remember wanting like the very devil to have Walter win this one because

in addition to the personal element it would have made a great sports news story The comeback of the old ex-champion has always been one of America's favourites

The morning of the final round Hagen led the star-studded field by several strokes and it looked as though he might be going to turn the trick, but immediately he began to play he started to slip – a stroke here, a stroke there – the sound championship form which had been his through the early rounds was no longer there

This state of affairs was very much on the conscience of two sports writers, a colleague of mine, the late Grantland Rice and myself There was a kind of a roadhouse night-club a few miles outside of Augusta and thither golfers and reporters repaired for conviviality in the evenings during the tournament Hagen had been celebrating there, remaining until four or five in the morning and managing not only to appear upon the first tee in the morning on time, but also to deliver a brand of super golf Thus when at the end of the two days' play he appeared to have the tournament sewed up, so eager were Rice and I to see this achieved that we devised a little plot between us

That night we kept stealing drinks from him No sooner would he set his Scotch and soda down after having had a sip of it when we would whisk it away He would call for a fresh one and the procedure would be repeated Then we practically kidnapped him from the club and took him back to the hotel and put him to bed at eleven o'clock to get a full night's sleep

The results showed how wrong it is to tamper with nature or alter the winning rhythm, for apparently the shock of going to bed and sleeping for nine hours proved too much for Hagen's system and on the last day, in the dramatic finale with Hagen playing in the same foursome with the eventual winner of the tourney, neck and neck, strokes as I have indicated were beginning to slip away from him I felt desperately responsible Why had not Rice and I left well enough alone? And so I tried to hex his opponent

I now present a picture of a grown man following a golf foursome in a major tournament, muttering gibberish to himself

Of course I wasn't really hexing, but in my eagerness to see Hagen come through I thought how wonderful it would be if I knew some magic words to say that would cause Walter's opponent to fluff a bunker lie, or roll a short putt eight feet past the hole And so, when matters became tense and the Hague's nearest opponent was about to make a shot, the success of which would put Walter still deeper in the hole, I made up words of magical

gibberish in the sort of despairing, infantile hope that they might be the ones necessary, the words of power that would summon Beelzebub to joggle the fellow's elbow at the critical moment. These charms I mumbled to myself, well out of earshot of the contestants. This was strictly between me and Old Nick.

Well, here the long arm of coincidence consented to be yanked, and Hagen's opponent actually blew two strokes on easy shots he should have made, which, I must say, alarmed me somewhat as well as delighted me. Hagen picked up two sorely needed strokes and I was in a fair way to hang out my shingle as an operating wizard.

Then nature and form took their normal course. Walter's golf wouldn't stand up against his non-hangover putters, and, magic or no magic, his opponent pulled himself together and went on handily to win.

Years later, while rummaging through the attic of my mind for an idea for a story in this series, I remembered my moment of complete idiocy at the Augusta tournament, and *THE WITCH OF WOONSAPUCKET* was the result.

Any reader for entertainment or student of fiction writing in possession of the egregious facts can see how this story was put together. Using nothing but the original notion of a guy trying to put a silent hex on a golfing opponent, the train of thought would move naturally from hexing to witches, to witch-burning, and thence to the vicinity of Salem, Mass.; where the story is laid.

This is a formula story, a somewhat despised creation in literary circles, but I must confess I love the kind. They are fun to think up, fun to plan, and fun to write. They come as a lightening of the load and a blessed relief. They fall into the category of what is scathingly known as potboilers, and many a brimming pot I've boiled with them, but I am not content to rest upon the confession that I made frequent compromise sorties into lower levels of magazine taste in order to keep the larder stocked. There was never any writing down in these stories. I always wrote them to the best of my ability at the particular moment. But often I would get as much pleasure, and sometimes more, out of knocking out a Bill Fowler business-golf story, or a *débutante* yarn, as many of the other, more serious attempts in which I was trying to convey a burn, or a yearning or an honest emotion to paper.

For these pieces served two purposes. They amused and rested me and they also entertained the customers. They constituted a welcome change of pace for them and for me.

Sometimes I would receive scolding letters from clients asking

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'Why do you waste time on junk like So-and-So? Why don't you write more stories like Whatsis?' naming some story that had appealed to them emotionally. But the formula stories also brought in approving mail, and if somebody wrote 'I read that story out loud to my wife last night, and we both laughed until we were sick' I considered that there could not be much higher praise and my time and efforts had not gone unrewarded.

It is the characteristic of the formula story that the basic pattern of the story remains static. Only the scene and incidents change. While top magazines by no means restrict themselves to formula stories, every magazine has one or two pet formulas based upon trial and reader reaction. They vary. The 'Collier's' formula differed from the 'Post' type, which in turn is quite different from the ones favoured by 'Cosmopolitan' or 'American' or 'Red Book' or the women's magazines.

To me the word 'formula' in story means that certain ingredients, as in a prescription, are always present. Here, for instance, are the ingredients of the golf-business story. The hero and narrator, the young and not too bright advertising manager for a golf-equipment manufacturing firm, at the beginning of each story is given some near-impossible task by his irascible and demanding boss. This task is always complicated by circumstances, the honest stupidity of the hero, or the machinations of his not too ethical rival, the villain, who is the advertising manager for the rival firm. The story then moves out on the golf course among the pros, where trouble continues to pile up for the hero. Just when things look blackest, the hero does something dumbly honest, or despairing, or the villain perpetrates the final deed, in which he out-smarts himself, virtue triumphs, and everything turns out just fine in the best of all possible worlds.

It would be churlish to scorn the 'Saturday Evening Post' for never tiring of this one when the truth is that the readers served by the 'Post' are the ones who never weary of it. Like children listening to fairytales, the oft-told, well-remembered stories are always the best and the ones they wish to have repeated.

To the writer or story-maker the challenge comes in trying to fit new ideas, new backgrounds, and new characters into this pattern and keeping it ever fresh so that the reader is never aware he is reading a formula story. He just feels comfortable and knows he is enjoying himself. Often this work is like a fascinating picture puzzle in which the pieces stubbornly refuse to fall into place. But when they do and things go right, the story can be written at a breathless gallop and with great pleasure. THE WITCH OF WOONSAPUCKET was one of these

THE WITCH OF WOONSAPUCKET

Do you believe in witches, keep away from black cats, worry if you bust a mirror, and stay home in bed on Friday the thirteenth? I am only asking, because personally I am not superstitious myself, though I must confess that I am more than a little partial to a small ivory lucky elephant about the size of a walnut that Freddy McRae brought back for me from a golfing tour he made through India one winter and that I carry in my left pants pocket just in case. And, boy, if I hadn't had it along with me that time the Professional Golfers' Association Championship got itself h'anted, I hate to think what would have happened to poor Elmer Brown, who was just a big dumb kid, but sweet and decent, and that swell Mary Summers he was so struck on.

I mean, when it comes to that stuff about witches riding on broomsticks and Old Ned moving into a guy's golf bag and telling him what stick to use and where to place the ball to turn a tough par-five hole into a drive, a pitch, and a putt, your Uncle William Fowler, Esq., just gives it the broad 'haw'. But there's something cute about that little elephant and it doesn't take up much space anyway, and to think I almost forgot it when I changed suits before I went up to Woonsapucket for the P G A. Championship last year because I was so sore at old A. R. spoiling the party for me.

Being the assistant advertising manager of A. R. Mallow & Co., in charge of promotion, means that I do all the dirty work. And that was just what I was called upon to do when, the day before I was to leave for Massachusetts, I went in to see A. R. in response to his buzzer. Any time I am yanked in to the boss's office and he is sitting there with his glasses on the end of his nose and a paper in his hand, I know that there is going to be some trouble for William.

'Ha! Ahmmm! Hrrrrmph! Fowler, I have here a memo compiled for me by Mr. Gulgins of the business department. It is a list of the professionals under contract to us and their - ah - accomplishments. Top-heavy! Carrying some deadwood. Uncertain times, Fowler. Business unsteady. Everyone nervous. Good time to retrench. Must cut down, eh? This fellow Brown - hrrrrmph! - Elmer Brown from - ah - Osceola, Iowa. What has he done to earn his pay?'

Well, he had me there, because Elmer hadn't exactly set any fairways on fire since I had signed him up three years before when it had looked as though he might be going to win the Open. But

he was such a decent, earnest guy that I thought I'd at least have one crack at saving him, so I said

'Gee whiz, A R, he's just a kid He placed seventh in the Open in '36, and had it won if he hadn't folded on the last three holes, and——'

'Ha! Exactly, Fowler There is no room on the Mallow & Co payroll for professionals who fold This young man has done nothing since then, according to my memo, but place ninth in the Los Angeles Open, and twelfth at the Masters Tournament in Augusta His contract has expired I do not wish it renewed He has brought no credit to A R Mallow products Ha! Hum!' With the last 'Ha! Hum!' he pushed his glasses back up on the bridge of his nose, which was always the signal that A R meant what he said and there was no use arguing

Of course they would hold the P G A in a place by the name of Woonsapucket, Mass, five miles from Salem, but to the boys who cover for the papers, a thousand miles from anywhere As far as our business is concerned, the lines are all pretty well laid out in that tournament, which is just for the pros, and there's no scrambling or chiselling or gambling to be done as there is around an Open, beyond a little polite needling We always like it when one of our pros wins, and advertise it, but it doesn't count with the public like the Open So for me it's just an annual week's vacation where I can relax, follow the boys around, and have myself some laughs But it's a bad way to start a good time to have to give a nice kid the heave-oh I guess maybe I'm just too tender-hearted

There wasn't even a hotel at Woonsapucket and there was no room to stay at the Woonsapucket Golf Club, which was eight miles outside of Salem, so they had the boys quartered around in private houses, the citizens chipping in with room and board as a matter of civic pride I found I was sharing a room in a fine old house with our Freddy McRae, who had as good a chance as anyone to win the tournament I told him that I was going to have to give Elmer Brown the axe He shrugged his shoulders and said 'That's a shame. He's a good kid, even though he is an awful hick That's all that's the matter with him He hasn't got that hay out of his hair yet He's shy and scared Every time he steps on to a tee with someone who's got a name, he's licked.'

I went out to the club Saturday morning, the day before the tournament started It was a pretty course, long, and winding through woods every inch of the way I had been wondering whether I would break the news to Elmer before or after the tournament. I suppose it would have been kinder to wait until

it was all over and keep that load off his mind, but I thought that maybe if I told him right away it would make him just mad enough to go out there and play some golf. And if he could make any kind of a showing in the tournament, maybe I might risk giving A R another argument.

I found him putting on the practice green. Not that he was hard to find, because he had a build like a heavyweight's. He was grain-fed, big, husky, with corn-tassel hair and blue eyes and a broad mouth. He'd been brought up on a farm out in Iowa.

I didn't waste much time after the handshake and the usual about how his game was going. I came right out with it and said, 'Look here, Elmer, I'm sorry to have to be the one to tell you this, but you're on the spot.'

He straightened up from a putt he was going to make. Gloom was smeared as thick as butter all over his big, good-natured pan. And he looked scared too. He said, 'Oh gee. Do you mean—?'

I started to give him a lot of stuff right out of A R's book—retrenchment, unsettled conditions, nothing personal, economy wave, things ought to be better next year—when he cut in with

'Aw, gee, Mr Fowler. I know. You don't have to let me down easy. I know I ain't been winning enough to clean the rust off a mashie. If it hadn't been for you folks I'd a had to go back to the farm long ago. I guess I knew it was coming.'

There was a sort of silence in which I felt rotten, and he leaned over and banged a nine-footer into the cup. Then he straightened up and said

'Mr Fowler, would it do any good if I won the P G A?'

I looked at him. 'It would help, kid. It would give me an argument with A R. Even if the P G A doesn't count a hell of a lot selling merchandise, A R is smart enough to know that the man who wins it is also capable of winning the Open, or one of those other big publicity tournaments like the Masters.'

He said, 'Gee, Mr Fowler, I just gotta win, then. I just gotta.' It was pipe-lined straight from his heart. And before I could speak the question I had written on my face, he said.

'I got a girl, Mr Fowler. Gee, she's sweet.'

I said, 'Oh-oh!' The last time one of our pros got himself a girl, it came so close to costing us the Open I didn't even want to think about it. But he hadn't heard me. That far-away look of men in love and fighters who have been popped on the chin came into his eyes, and he was off. 'Gee, Mr Fowler, she's the most wonderful person I ever met.'

So I got the whole story from him. He had been assigned to the Wellbye cottage, kept by a spinster, Miss Sarah Wellbye, and the house had been in the family for more than two hundred and fifty years. Miss Wellbye's niece, Mary Summers, was staying there with her for her vacation. Mary was a college girl, a stenographer in Boston, and had black hair and blue eyes and wasn't any bigger than a milking stool, but gee, she was sweet and smart as a buggy whip, and he had fallen in love with her the first day he saw her, a week ago, when he arrived there to practise, and he couldn't understand why, but she liked him too, and they were going to be married when the tournament was over, the thousand dollars' prize money would get them started.

Well, the more he rattled on, the glummer I got. There he was, all full of young love and wanting to get married to a nice girl, and I had just fired him. And I knew just how tough it was for a young pro who wasn't winning anything to keep himself fed, let alone marry.

And as for winning the P G A ! I didn't have the heart to tell him. As McRae said, he was a shy, hero-worshipping type who got the meemies every time he played anybody with a name like MacDonough, or Crabby Wilson, or Craig, or Steubner. All they had to do was throw a ball on to the tee and he was licked. And the P G A was match play against the toughest, coldest, most hardboiled, goat-getting crew in the racket. He didn't stand any more chance with them than I would of breaking 80 at Pinehurst with a croquet mallet and a butterfly net.

But I gave him a little pep talk and wished him luck and then beat it off to the locker room to have myself a little snort. It certainly was a swell introduction to a lousy time.

They really give a golfer a workout the way they play that P G A. It stretches out over a week. The first two days they play eighteen holes, each of qualifying medal play, starting Sunday. The low sixty-three qualify, along with last year's champion, who qualifies automatically, making sixty-four in all. On Tuesday they play two eighteen-hole matches, which knocks the field down to sixteen by nightfall, and from then on, it's thirty-six holes a day to the end.

Outside of Elmer's troubles there wasn't a thing to worry about. All of our boys, and we had four in the tournament, qualified nicely, and, for that matter, so did Elmer, but that didn't surprise me, because the guy wasn't so bad at medal play. He could cock a ball a mile when he really let out and wasn't under pressure. He was so big and powerful that he never used more than a three-quarter swing. But that didn't mean anything,

because by Tuesday night Elmer would have departed for Osceola, Iowa. The poor sucker had managed to get himself into the tough side of the draw. And, brother, that upper bracket read just like the Social Register of golf. It was loaded for bear. At least a dozen of them were champions or former champions. Angus MacDonough, the Fairgreen pro who had won the Open that year, was in the lower half, and had a cinch. Also I met Elmer's girl, Mary Summers.

There's something sweet, right away, about the name Mary, and she lived up to all of it. She had that quiet sincerity that seems to go with dark hair and blue eyes. She wore her hair very smooth and glossy so that you wanted to touch it with your hand, but, for all her tiny figure—she came just about up to Elmer's shoulder—she had a good, strong, firm chin and a mouth that looked as if its owner might mean business sometimes. And was she stuck on big Elmer! She didn't seem to mind that he wasn't the brightest guy on earth. All she cared was that he was sweet and kind, and could break her in two, maybe, if he ever took a full backswing before he hugged her. Why do all those cute tricks go for guys like that when here is your Uncle Fowler around just dying for someone soft and agreeable who will soothe his feverish head when he brings it home at night, hot and throbbing from the daily effort of thinking up ways to make more dubs buy more A. R. Mallow products?

We met on the clubhouse porch after the qualifying round. Elmer was drinking himself a glass of milk and kidding with the guys, because they all liked him, he was so modest and decent and unspoiled, and he called out: 'Mr Fowler, I want you to meet Mary Summers. Mary, this is Mr Fowler of the A. R. Mallow Company. That's the company that—that—I have been working for. He thinks I have a chance to win.'

Mary gave me one of those deep, kind, welcoming smiles as though, by thinking that, I belonged, and shook my hand and said: 'This is the first golf match I ever saw, Mr Fowler, but surely Elmer will win because he plays so beautifully. And of course you know why it is so important to us. Elmer told me that—that you know,' and she suddenly gave Elmer's arm a little hug with such a natural, tender gesture that I thought I'd got one of our Tuff-Hide balls stuck in my throat because all the time I was looking right over her shoulder at what amounted to Elmer's walking papers. It was the draw-sheet on the club bulletin board, and Elmer was down to play old Archie Crobb in the first round. Uhuh. You got the name right away. It was just like taking a kid out of the amateur ranks for his first professional

prizefight and saying 'Come on in here, son, and meet your opponent His name is Joe Louis'

Archie was a crochety old Scotchman, but he had been around for years and had the smoothest swing of the pack And how he loved to take those youngsters apart in match play!

'Do come and take dinner with us at Wellbye Cottage, Mr Fowler,' Mary was saying

'Gee, yes,' Elmer added. 'It's the most interesting house you ever saw It's full of things, just like a museum, from before the Revolution even . '

But I was hardly listening to them All I could think of was that poor kid trying to tell his girl that he was out of the tournament, out of a job, and flat broke I mumbled something about thanks and congratulations and, sure, Elmer would come through, and got away I even had half a notion of going to Archie and asking him not to pour it into the kid too badly, though a lot of difference it made whether he went out three and two or nine and eight But Arch was too mean, anyway He loved to rub their noses in it So I just went into the locker room down to the crying corner where the guys who had failed to qualify were gathered I felt at home there, it was so nice and gloomy

Were you ever around a golf tournament on the day when they play those two eighteen-hole sudden-death matches? Brother, it's a shambles, and you know it The corpses of the famous dead lie piled eight high in the locker room, the grillroom is made hideous with the groans of the wounded and dying, and those that survive come off the course with a look of madness in their eyes The word 'Upset' falls with a monotonous and sickly thud upon the eardrums I lost Whitey Brompton, one of our best men, to an unknown pro from Alabama who hit the ball as though he had a twitch, and Reggie Ring, another of our topnotchers, had the tough luck to meet Crabby Wilson, the Sweetwood pro, when Crabby was red-hot That made two And I just did pull Freddy McRae through in extra holes in the afternoon Excitement? Plenty of it, with stars dumped right and left

Oh yes, and Elmer was still in the tournament when the day was over He beat Archie Crobb on the nineteenth hole, and in the afternoon took over Nelson Rohm, the crack Midwest pro, one up on the eighteenth I didn't see it happen, nobody did, for that matter, but the scorer who went with them, because they had no gallery But from what the scorers told me afterwards, Elmer just had all the luck that can happen to one guy at a time Crobb had him dormy on the fifteenth On the six-

teenth they were both on in two, but off the pin Elmer had to make a birdie to have a chance to stay in the show, so he jumped at the putt and rolled four feet past the hole. He sank the one coming back, but it was too late then, because Crobb shoved his putt to within eight inches of the hole for a sure half. The old guy waited for Elmer to knock the ball away and concede the victory. Elmer didn't say anything, so Crobb took his time studying the putt, while the kid stood off to one side with a funny expression on his face, staring at Archie. Crobb putted carefully and surely so that he couldn't miss, and then, by gum, the ball shot off in the funniest way and finished eight inches to one side of the hole. Archie glared as though he couldn't believe it and took a five to Elmer's four. Elmer squared the match on the eighteenth and won it on the nineteenth with a great birdie.

In the afternoon round, against Nelson Rohm, he was cooked again. They were all square on the eighteenth tee. Elmer topped his drive, took an extra one in the rough, and lay four on the edge of the green. Nelson hit a screamer, his best drive of the day, and had the easiest kind of a niblick pitch to the pin for a sure four or a possible three. The scorer said Elmer must have been thinking of that train ride back to Iowa from the horrified way he stared at Nelson while the Midwest pro measured the distance, niblick in hand and got ready to give him the axe. And then, apparently for no reason at all, Rohm hit his niblick shot right up on to the clubhouse porch, nearly killing an eightball who was carrying a tray of drinks. He had to play it off flagstone from behind a pillar and bounced it into some shrubbery and from there into a bunker. He took a nice juicy seven. Elmer won the hole and the match with a six. Funny, huh?

I went to look up Elmer to congratulate him and give him another pep talk. That girl, and luck, were sure working wonders for him. I found Mary, but she hadn't seen him since he had come off the course. She was a little troubled because, she said, he had walked right past without looking at her, but I smoothed that out by explaining that when a guy comes off the green after winning a tough match he sometimes doesn't know his own mother.

Do you know where I finally found Elmer, and it was late too, and the locker room practically deserted? In the washroom, staring at himself in the mirror with the wildest, scariest, funniest expression I ever saw on any human face. Funny, too, that he didn't seem to see me come up behind him, because when I clouted him on the shoulder with a 'Good work, kid!' he jumped

as though he had seen the Devil and let out a yell. He came down on his feet, but his knees were shaking.

He said 'Ow! I - uh - er - th-th-thanks, M₁ F-F-Fowler,' and turned and ran right out of the washroom and out of the building too.

I put it down as a case of unstrung golf nerves after a couple of harrowing matches.

Which just goes to show you how wrong Mr Fowler can be.

And one after another, my guys got themselves kicked out of the tournament. You remember who met in the finals, don't you? That's right, Elmer Brown and Angus MacDonough. Elmer had walked right through Alex Gliddy, Crabby Wilson, and Chubby Craig, three of the best and toughest golfers in the business. I didn't see the matches because I was busy trying to root our stars through, but they said those three played the worst golf in their lives. Gliddy got an attack of hooking and parked five tee shots in a row out of bounds. Crabby Wilson couldn't putt for sour apples. He three-putted seven greens. And Chubby Craig, the greatest iron player in the game, actually got to shanking. Elmer, on the other hand, apparently couldn't do anything wrong. He holed out from bunkers. His ball took all the right kicks. If he got into trouble with his tee shot, he'd blast the next one so close to the cup he could blow it in. It was the talk of the tournament.

Yes, and there was some other kind of talk going on too, and I couldn't run it down. It was more a feeling that was in the air that you couldn't get hold of. The pros were off Elmer. They were giving him funny looks, and not speaking to him or kidding with him any more. And they used to love him. But the strangest thing I heard late Friday, when the semi-finals were finished, was that when Elmer's match with Chubby was over - he beat Chubby 8 and 7 - Craig refused to shake hands with him. Instead, they said, he waved one fist in front of Elmer's face in a queer way and snarled some word at him, and then turned and walked off the green. I thought maybe I'd better find Elmer and see what this was all about. But I couldn't locate him anywhere around the clubhouse. It was beginning to bother me, so I went into the locker room and had a couple of snorts. All right, maybe I had four, then. Anyway, when I got into my car parked behind the clubhouse I thought perhaps I wouldn't drive it just yet, but would sit there awhile and try to figure things out. I guess I must have fallen asleep, because when I woke up it was dark. It was nine o'clock by my wristwatch. I was just going to drive myself home when I saw a figure sneaking out the back door of the clubhouse. By its size and a flash of light on yellow hair, I knew

it was Elmer At the same time another figure suddenly came up the path I knew that one too, dark as it was She said

'Elmer dear, I've been looking for you What - what is wrong?'

The boy stood there in the dark for a moment 'N-nothing, M-Mary'

There was a long silence Then Mary began to speak again, in a low, clear, steady voice

'Elmer, this afternoon after the match was over, I was going through the woods to the car Two of the golfers were walking just in front of me I don't know their names, but they were two who played and had been put out They were talking about you They were saying that you had cheated'

There was another long silence in which I could hear my heart going 'bonk - bonk - bonk . . .'

'I went up to them, told them who I was One of them said 'Ma'm, we're sorry, because it's true He admitted it If you don't believe it, why don't you ask him?' and then they both walked away Elmer - I am asking you now Is it true?'

Did I listen for Elmer's answer? Yes, brother, you bet I did It was a long time coming At last he stammered 'M-M-Mary - gee, Mary - I - I - I can't say anything - I can't - I can't'

So there it was It seemed like hours before Mary said in a sort of small, hurt voice 'I - I'm sorry, Elmer I guess that's all, then I just can't stand a cheat If you win that tournament through cheating, why - why, don't ever speak to me again'

And then she turned and ran off down the path, and a moment later I heard a car starting and driving off Elmer waited until the last sound had died away Then he let out an awful groan, turned, and went back into the clubhouse Me, I wasn't more than six steps behind him

I found him sitting in a corner of the darkened locker room with his head in his hands I slid alongside him, put my arm around his shoulder, and said 'What's the matter, kid? Why don't you tell me and get it off your chest?'

He gave a couple of shudders and finally said 'Mr Fowler, I want to go home I want to default tomorrow and get out of here You can post my default for me I want to get out tonight, now, right away'

I tried to jolly him I said. 'Oh, come on, Elmer, you can't do that You're going great You've got to stay in there and fight for old Alma Mallow You're the only one we've got left You can't leave now If you do it'll cost you your job, and what's more, you'll never get another job because you'll be branded a quitter'

He shook his head and groaned. 'I don't care. I don't want

another job I just want to get out of here' Suddenly he stopped, hesitated, and then blurted out all in a heap 'Mr Fowler, I've done something awful I - I'm a witch'

I thought it was still those snorts I'd had earlier 'You're a what?'

'A - a witch, Mr Fowler I - I cheated I put a hex on Mr Crobb, and Mr Rohm, and Mr Gliddy too, though I didn't mean to, honestly, Mr Fowler, and I guess it got Mr Craig too, though I didn't put it on him, but it won't stop I gotta get out of here, Mr Fowler, I just gotta Can't you see?'

He wasn't kidding He was on the level He was so much on the level that there were tears in his eyes

I said 'Listen, kid, why don't you tell me what the hell this is all about? I don't believe you're a cheat, and I don't believe in witches, and—'

'I didn't mean to do it, Mr Fowler I didn't believe in it either, but I was desperate I had to win Mr Crobb had a "gumme" to win the match, and I was out of the tournament and my job, and I couldn't marry Mary Otherwise I wouldn't have said the words Honest I wouldn't, Mr Fowler'

I saw I had kind of to nurse him along to get anything out of him, so I said 'What words?'

'The words in the book'

'Uhuh What book?'

'The book I found in Mary's house I just looked into it It's old-like They have a lot of things there from before the Revolution - pictures, and arrowheads and guns, and books, printed in the old kind English, and there was this one book I just looked into, one night'

'What was the book?'

It was tough getting the story out of him because he was really unstrung, but it finally developed that he had found a copy of something called *Of Ye Plague of Wytches in Ye Colonies*, by the Reverend Hallelujah Snite, printed in Boston in 1699, and had read the thing out of curiosity and found some sort of words in it which, according to the Reverend Dr Snite, the witches of old Salem used to summon Old Nick for a party It was getting tough to keep from laughing, because I wanted to badly

'Just what were the words?'

'Do I have to say them?'

'Go ahead I'm a Psi Kappa Psi myself.'

He gobbled a little and finally came out with some balderdash that sounded like 'Abrogath Ahrimanes Abaddon,' and then looked around him frightened, as though he expected to see Old

Harry snap to attention out of a cloud of sulphur with an 'At your service, sir!'

'So what happened?'

'Well, I was in this jam and was practically out of the tournament, and then I suddenly remembered those words I didn't really believe in it, but I had to do something, Mr Fowler Mr Crobb couldn't miss an eight-inch putt So I said them'

'Out loud?'

'Oh, gee, no Just to myself'

'Could old Archie see you?'

'No, sir I was standing behind him out of his line so he couldn't see me at all

'And Archie blew the putt! Wow!' I just couldn't hold it in any longer and had to let go with a dozen guffaws that shook the locker room 'Kid, it's the discovery of the age You write 'em down for me Will I give it to that louse J Sears Hammett of the Fairgreen Company the next time I play him a five-buck Nassau'

But the kid wasn't laughing He said 'But you don't understand, Mr Fowler It's no joke I didn't believe it at first, so when Mr Rohm had me on the hook, I said them again and Mr Rohm put his niblick shot into the clubhouse and took a seven And when I played Mr Gliddy I guess I must have said them once more without knowing it, and the Devil made him hook five tee shots in a row, and by then I was so scared I swore I'd never use them again, but it's too late now, I've sold myself to Satan I didn't say anything when I played Mr Wilson, but there he was just the same, keeping Mr Wilson's putts out of the cup, and when I'd pull a six iron out of my bag I'd hear him say "Wrong club, sucker, it's a seven, play it high and fade it from right to left Can't you see that wind in the top of the trees?" I've raised him, Mr Fowler, and I can't get rid of him If I'd only done it once, maybe he wouldn't have charged just for a demonstration But he must want me awful bad, because he's working overtime I can't make a bad shot And I've lost my girl on account of him'

I said 'Listen, you big dope, those guys would have blown those shots anyway Didn't you ever jab at a six-inch putt and see it stay out? Or get an attack of sausage fingers and find your game slipping away? All that stuff is a lot of hooey anyway, but if it'll do you good and make you think you can beat those guys, what the hell! And anyway, they don't know about it, so—'

'That's one of the worst troubles, Mr Fowler, they do!'

'What? How could they find out—?'

'I—I told them, Mr Fowler—yesterday before I played Mr Craig'

'You what? Why, you sap—'

It seems that the kid was scared and worried and uncertain whether he really had made a spell, or whatever it was, because he knew from his farm upbringing that Beelzebub doesn't do that kind of work for nothing, so he had asked old Crobb whether he had felt anything when he made that putt, and of course the old guy had said 'Yes, why?' Huh! Show me a golfer who won't grab for an alibi! The poor dope had told him, and of course Crobb had snarled 'Ay, I feltit something pushit my elbow I no hae missit a wee putt like that gang on thurty years' And Rohm then chimed in and said when he mis-hit that niblick shot it was just as though somebody else was swinging the club, and Gliddy recalled that coming down the seventeenth fairway he had actually said 'This damned driver of mine must be bewitched' And Crabby Wilson had said 'Hah! No wonder I couldn't get a putt down all day' And then they had all turned on him and accused him of cheating, hexing them, casting the evil eye, and conduct unbecoming a member of the Professional Golfers' Association. The match when Chubby Craig shanked all day had finished it.

'They're in the grillroom right now, holding a meeting over it, Mr Fowler,' concluded Elmer 'They're going to have me barred anyway. Let me go back to Osceola, Mr Fowler. I can't go on Satan's moved into my golf bag. I just gotta hang it up.'

I said 'Listen, kid. You stay here until I get back. I'm going to that meeting. Those sharks aren't going to push one of my guys out of a tournament that way. You do as I say, understand?'

And I went busting into the grillroom. I was just in time too. There was a big crowd of the pros there, and Archie Crobb was saying 'All those favouring to expel Elmer Brown and bar him frae the final say—' when I walked through the door and finished it for him.

'Say what? Are you guys nuts? What's the matter with Brown? Can't you birds take a licking without crying?'

Crabby Wilson said 'We can when it's on the level,' and Nelson Rohm shouted 'What are you doing in here, Fowler? This is a closed meeting. You don't belong here.'

I said 'Maybe I don't, but I'm not going to let you railroad one of my guys out of this tournament for nothing.'

'For nothing!' shouted Crabby Wilson. 'He put the whammie on me! Every time I'd go to putt, my eyes would water so I couldn't see the ball.'

'He admittit himself he called on the De'il,' said Crobb 'The mon's a witch I haven't misstit a wee put like thot in thurr—'

I said 'You're a fool, Crobb There aren't any male witches' 'Aweel, then, callit him a wizard, it's a' the same'

'I'll say he's a wizard, the way he plastered you three straight holes after you lost your nerve and blew a kick-in'

'What about his telling me he put a spell on me before I hit that shot to the eighteenth? The ball went up into the clubhouse, didn't it?' said Nelson Rohm

'Yeah,' I said 'He told you afterwards I suppose you never missed a green in your life before Sure, the kid's a little screwy like all you birds, but—'

Angus MacDonough chimed in here 'A mon has no richt to do wi' bogles in a gowf match I'll no have to do wi' him The De'il's in his bag'

I said 'O K, boys You do what you like, but I'm going out and dig up a couple of golf writers and give them the story of how a lot of grown men who got licked by a green kid had to work up an alibi for themselves'

I thought that would do it It did, too There were a lot of sensible guys there and they talked it over and finally agreed to do nothing and go ahead with the tournament

'But you tell that young mon I'll no 'be bewitched,' warned Angus 'The fairst spell I feel, I'll magic him wi' a niblick'

I went back into the locker room and got Elmer and said 'Son, you'd better get all that nonsense out of your head They were holding a meeting to consider the course for next year's tournament You come on home with me and get a night's sleep and tomorrow you'll pin Angus's ears back for good old Mallow.'

He shook his head 'Aw, what's the use, Mr Fowler? I don't want the job any more I've lost Mary She thinks I'm a cheat like the rest of them do.'

So I piled into him about quitting and gave him a ten-minute speech that any football coach would have paid me for, winding up with 'You can't let this thing lick you this way Go on out there and prove that you can whip—'

He interrupted me suddenly A change seemed to have come over him. He jumped up and said 'I will, Mr Fowler By crickey, I will I can make good I will. *I know how*'

I took him home with me Boy, I was tickled to death Mallow was going to collect another championship I wouldn't have been so pleased if I'd known what he really meant

So the next morning we went out to play the final match against Angus MacDonough, with me carrying Elmer's bag.

That's right I had to caddie for him Elmer's regular boy, a big African from Mobile by the name of Four Toes, met me down by the caddie pen, and he was on his way out, headed south. He said 'You gotta excuse me, Mistuh Fowler Ah ain' gonna carry dat bag no mo' De Debbil's done got in it Ebbrybody say so Ebbry time Ah give a club to Mistuh Brown de Debbil he say to him to take another Ah heerd de voice an' seen de smoke commin' outen de bag No *suh*! Ah am' touchin' it no mo' All the other caddies had disappeared I picked up Elmer's clubs and went to the first tee Elmer didn't even notice that I was carrying for him He was like a guy all wiapped up in something Angus turned his back on him and so did Angus's caddie, who was none other than Dutch Steubner, another Faargreen pro That witchcraft story had got all the caddies so scared they wouldn't go anywhere near Elmer It was a good thing there weren't any of the top-flight golf writers around that tournament or they would have been asking plenty of questions As it was, some of those smart guys from Boston were nosing around trying to track down some of the rumours they'd heard, and I had to tell plenty of lies There was nothing unusual in Angus MacDonough refusing to look at an opponent, or speak to him, because he had the reputation of being a mean, goat-getting grouch in match play, but I wondered whether the reporters would catch on to the surreptitious signs he and Dutch and all the other golfers who were in the gallery made every time that Elmer would look at them - you know, fist doubled up with thumb and little finger sticking out, and X's and circles in the air

I was glad when we got started I wanted to get it over with There were about a thousand or so in the gallery, and they must have felt there was something in the air, because they were sort of hushed when they moved off after us, following two nice drives that split the fairway, Elmer's some forty yards past Angus's Angus knocked a four iron on to the green, about fourteen feet from the pin Elmer pulled a number seven out of the bag I said 'It's a six, kid There's an upslope in front of the green. If you don't reach, it'll stop the ball dead'

Do you know what that fool kid did? He put his hands over his ears Then he said 'Stand behind me, caddie' I got it, all right He meant 'Get thee behind me, Satan' Then he hit a perfect seven iron. Only, as I said, it was a six-iron shot The ball hit in front of the green, hesitated, and then rolled back down the slope And his chip hit the bank and stopped outside of Angus's ball. Elmer had to putt first and rolled to within a foot of the cup for a fairly sure five. It was Angus's turn to putt

He took a long time over it and then hit one that certainly was a dilly I never saw a worse shot on a green He must have lunged at it It wound up seven feet past the hole to one side Angus stared at it as though he couldn't believe it Then he turned angrily on Elmer, but before he could say anything, Elmer went over to Angus's ball, knocked it away with a 'That's good,' and walked off the green There was a murmur of astonishment from the crowd

I said 'What the devil did you do that for, you sap? He was a sure thing to miss that putt coming back and you'd have halved the whole Now you're one down'

'No, I ain't,' said Elmer softly, 'no, I ain't I'm one up On that feller you just mentioned And I'm going to whip him all the way'

So that's how it was going to be Yes, and that's how it was, too When I brought him in to the clubhouse at the end of the first eighteen holes, he was exactly fourteen down He underclubbed, he overclubbed, he conceded putts, he took penalties The people in the gallery were sore as pups, grumbling and threatening to demand their money back or complain to the officials, but Angus was tickled to death, and so were the other pros They acted just as though they had it coming to them The newspaper boys kept barging up to me, asking 'What's he doing, throwing the match? What's the idea?' and I'd yell 'Oh, leave us alone Didn't you ever see a guy in a slump before? He'll be all right after lunch' But of course that last was hooley It was all over I could have killed Elmer, except that for the first time since it all started he seemed halfway happy and some of the fear was gone from his face I left him alone in a corner of the grill drinking milk and went out by myself I was too sick to eat I passed a group of officials conferring in front of the clubhouse and heard they were going to call a meeting before the tee-off again after lunch They had to, because everybody was squawking I went into the woods bordering the sixth fairway to cool off I didn't even want a drink I had my hands stuffed down into my pockets and was kicking at things

So that was how I came to haul that lucky elephant out of my pocket, because after a while I got to feeling it there, sort of hard and funny-shaped I said, 'You're a fine damn mascot, you are! You're supposed to be lucky, eh? You're nothing but a Jonah, and here you go,' and with that I took a baseball pitcher's wind-up and heaved it as hard and as far as I could into a clump of bushes.

There was a gasp, and somebody said, 'Ow!' I ran around to the other side of them to apologise to whoever I had beaned.

You guessed it It was Mary Summers She was sitting on a log There were tear-stains on her face where she had been crying. The elephant was lying at her feet

I said 'Gee, Mary, I'm sorry Where have you been? I've wanted to see you Elmer—'

She began to cry again 'Oh, Bill, I'm so miserable I accused Elmer of cheating, and left him without giving him a real chance to explain I don't care what he's done, I love him He isn't a cheat And I saw what he was doing this morning And instead of helping him, I - Oh, Bill—'

So then I told her the whole story, right from the beginning And sometimes she laughed, but with tears and tenderness behind it, and sometimes she cried and made little gestures with her arms as though she were taking the absent Elmer into them I wound up 'The poor kid is off his nut He thinks he sinned saying those words, and has to atone for it by throwing the match to that old sour-puss Angus and beat the Devil that way, even though it costs him his job and the chance to marry you, and Angus, the old goat, behaves as though he had it coming to him, with the other pros egging him on, because by blaming it all on Elmer it gives them an alibi for their lousy golf The reporters are hot on the trail of the story, though they haven't got it yet, but if it gets out, the kid'll be ruined The officials are going to call a meeting in the clubhouse private office before the afternoon Maybe they'll disqualify him right there I don't know. It's an awful mess.'

The girl took a deep breath and straightened up Gee, she was a sweet sight with her blue eyes shining She said 'Bill - Bill - we've got to do something Right away.'

'I know, but what? Maybe it's too late'

She was staring down at my elephant suddenly She said 'Bill, what is that?'

I said 'That's my elephant I carry it around in my pocket' 'What for?'

'For luck But the luck was all bad, so I heaved it'

She picked it up, gazed at it for a moment, and then handed it to me There was a strange look on her face

'Put it back in your pocket, Bill Maybe it will turn out to be the best friend you or I ever had' She glanced at her watch and gave a little gasp 'Oh! There isn't much time Hurry, Bill! Go to that meeting Don't let them leave Do anything to hold them I'll be there at two o'clock,' and she was streaking off through the woods like a young deer.

I went back to the clubhouse, but quick. The afternoon tee-off

time was two-fifteen. At ten minutes to two the meeting was called by the officials. It was attended by Elmer and myself and Angus and Dutch, and all the pros that Elmer had beaten, and half a dozen others. Old Bill Wattley, the chief referee, didn't waste any time. He was boiling mad. He lit into poor Elmer and said that what he had done that morning was a disgrace to professional golfing, that people had paid good money to see a fair match. He lit into old Angus too, and the other pros, and said that he had heard a lot of silly stories, and there and now meant to get at the truth of the matter before he decided what action he would take.

Nobody wanted to say anything at first because, now that it was going to be dragged out in open meeting, they were a little ashamed, I guess, but finally old Archie Crobb spoke up and said 'Meester Wattley, 'tis ony richt he should gi' back to us what he tookit by foul means. He's admittit he has to do wi' bogles and Beelzebub and the sperrits o' the pit. I no hae missit a wee putt like that in thurrtty—'

Elmer suddenly got up, big, lanky, and miserable, and interrupted 'Aw, gee, Mr Wattley, let me default and get out of here. I don't care what they say about me. Mr Crobb is right. I didn't deserve to win. I—'

'Oh yes you did, Elmer,' said Mary Summers. She had opened the door and come in very quietly. It was just two o'clock. She had a book under her arm, and she threw it down on the table. It was old and yellow, and from where I sat I could see it was the treatise by the Reverend Hallelujah Snite. Everybody stared at it as though it were a snake, including Elmer.

'Oh yes, you deserve to win, Elmer,' Mary repeated, and then looked the whole crowd over coolly and a little as though they were insects. 'I know the whole silly story. All you gentlemen who are so righteous, did you ever hear this "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone"?'

A fly buzzing on the windowpane sounded just like a dive-bomber, it was that quiet.

'Mr Crobb,' said Mary Summers, 'turn out your pockets!'

Nobody moved. 'Wha—what did ye say, lass?' said old Crobb.

'I said turn out your pockets, Mr Crobb. Put whatever you have here on the table. At once.'

By jeeppers, old Crobb did. He was hypnotised. His hands came up from his pockets full of junk which he laid on the table—some bills, coins, a little roll of tape, pocket-knife, half a dozen tees, and a little rabbit's-foot set in silver.

'Now you, Mr Wilson,' her voice rising, 'and you and you and you all of you Out with them'

By jeepers, they were *all* hypnotised Even I turned mine out before I knew it And then Mary was at the table, picking out objects from each pile and sweeping them towards the centre, the rabbit's-foot, punched coins, cat's-eyes, a piece of heather in a locket, framed four-leaf clovers, miniature horseshoes, little worsted Aucassins and Nicolettes, a curiously shaped stone or two, chunks of carved wood, a little silver devil on a ring, pairs of dice, medals, carved elephants, a piece of jade, and a silver pig

She pointed to the pile 'What do you call these?' she said

They all grinned sheepishly, and Archie Crobb said 'Eh, lass, what's wrang wi' a mascot?'

'Wrong? Do you know where the word "mascot" comes from?' asked Mary Summers 'In old French the word "masco" meant a sorceress or witch You're all in it, every one of you There isn't one of you who doesn't carry a talisman that you think gives you something on the other fellow, an edge, a spell, a lucky charm, something supernatural And you dare to pick on Elmer? You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, all of you That book there, that you're all so afraid of,' - she flipped it open - 'do you know what it is? It was written by a half-crazy, superstitious ninny about a pack of harmless, innocent old women who were drowned and stoned and hanged not more than five miles from here in Salem, to the everlasting shame of that city and a monument to ignorance and stupidity Do you know what that spell is that terrified all you big brave men so that you couldn't hit a little golf ball? There it is It was used by a lot of poor, ignorant, self-deluded wretches to curdle milk And it never curdled anything but your dispositions There, read it and see if it is any worse than that collection of ridiculous junk you carry around with you this year of 1942 to ward off bogies Grown men, all of you Very well You're all even now Put your nasty things back into your pockets and try to act like men and not a lot of frightened old women Elmer Brown, you go right out and play that man golf, out in the woods there where everything is fresh and sweet and clean And - and' - she hesitated suddenly and her lower lip began to tremble - 'and - I don't care whether you win or lose, I'll marry you because I love you, and I don't care if we s-s-s-starve Oh, Ellllllmer—'

And she was in his arms, crying, and all the pros were around her, patting her on the shoulder and apologising and trying to make up to Elmer, and Mary kissed Elmer as though nobody

was there, and Elmer suddenly raised up his arms with his fists clenched and shouted 'I've won! I've won! I've licked it And now I'll lick you too, Angus MacDonough Come on out on the course and take it . . .'

Whew! I'm glad I don't have to describe that last eighteen holes for you You read about it The greatest comeback in the history of golf, they called it And that Angus was playing too You don't catch him giving anything away But nobody ever saw golf like that kid played He'd never really hit a ball before as hard as he could because of his size and strength, which might rob him of control But now he had the control too When they set par for that course it wasn't for the kind of golf Elmer shot He simply made threes out of the fours, and fours out of the fives

There weren't more than fifty people on the tee when we started, but by the time we reached the ninth, there were two thousand galloping on our heels, and Elmer, who had turned in thirty, was only seven down Even the cooks and waiters came out of the kitchen to see the miracle As I toted Elmer's bag past the clubhouse from the ninth green to the tenth tee, a Western Union boy handed me a telegram It was from A R Mallow, who must have been listening in to the match on the radio It said

TRUST YOU HAVE NOT MADE MISTAKE OF LETTING BROWN GET AWAY FROM US STOP IF HE WINS RAISE SALARY TWELVE HUNDRED A YEAR STOP A R

Me make the mistake! Wasn't that just like A R?

You read how Elmer squared the match on the seventeenth to the greatest frenzy of cheering I ever heard, and then slipped up on the eighteenth to let Angus halve him Then Angus got into trouble on the nineteenth and was only on the edge of the green in three, while Elmer was on in two, but with a nasty, curling, downhill ten-foot putt Angus chipped into the cup from off the edge for his four, and the crowd gave him a great hand. A careful, certain four would keep the match open for Elmer another hole A three would win it But the putt was downhill, and if it missed the can, the ball would roll on and cost him the match and the championship if he missed coming back

Elmer knelt down and studied the line He studied it from every angle, inspected each blade of grass in the path to the hole Everybody knew that he was going to go for the cup and the match.

He bent over his putt and waited to steady his nerves And then I saw old Angus MacDonough do a funny thing He fished into his pocket and hauled forth a little scrap of paper, studied

it, glared at Elmer's back, and his lips moved, then he looked back at the paper again. Somehow, out of the corner of his eye, Elmer must have seen him too, for he straightened up all of a sudden, grinning.

Then he said: "The words, Mr MacDonough, are 'Abrogath Ahrimanes Abaddon,' but they don't mean a damn thing if you haven't got the golf to go with them. Watch this."

He leaned over and stroked the ball and I shut my eyes. Then I heard a gentle 'Bonk!' as it fell into the cup, and everybody was yelling and screaming and dancing, and Mary Summers was in the centre of it all, with her arms around big stupid Elmer's neck.

Boy, did I kiss that little old good-luck elephant of mine. Wouldn't it have been hell if I'd left it at home?

Penntifer's Plan

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This novelette was written in the fall of 1937. It is at once a prophecy, a romantic adventure and a love story. The prophecy is that of the Battle of Britain and the destruction of the city of Plymouth. The romantic adventure is the form and content, and the love story is my own – a writer falling in love with England.

Actually there are so many ingredients in this story, personal as well as impersonal, that I hardly know in what order to present them. In point of fact there probably is no order of presentation, for once a story has begun to germinate, ideas for it, notions, characters, etc., bubble up from all kinds of hidden recesses of the mind.

For instance that summer of 1937 I had again rented my cottage in Salcombe, Devon and I remember that there was a small aero club that flourished there, drawing its membership from the people of the village, shopowners, tradesmen, the garage man, the chap who ran the electrical shop and fixed one's radio and so on.

Once a week when the weather was fine an ex-R A F flier, a hedge-hopping barn-stormer, left over from the last war, would drop his Moth on to a farmer's field atop of Bolt Head, hang a wind sock from a pole and open for business. Members of the aero club would then go over and practise flying. Occasionally in the company of a friend of mine, the late Joe Payne who owned the electrical appliances shop at Salcombe, I would go over to the field myself and air out as the saying goes. I had taken out a private pilot's licence some five years before and this gave me a chance to keep my hand in. My friend Payne, incidentally, joined the R A F when war broke out and did become an R A F flyer and took part in the Battle of Britain. After the war he was accidentally drowned in Salcombe harbour. Something of Joe Payne is in this story.

Something, or even a good deal, of many of the people I learned to know at that time from the village and the farms, their staunch-

ness and simplicity and their shy patriotism and feeling for England, is likewise a part of this story as well as my own, for in those days living close to them and on a Devonshire hillside overlooking the sea, I was learning to love England and its people myself. And that affection too, I think, is manifest in this tale.

I cannot remember whether the feeling was general—I only know that in the summer of 1937 I myself had no doubt that Germany was bent upon world domination and that before long the non-Fascist world would be at war with the Nazis, or rather the Nazis would be warring upon us. I had been to Germany both in 1936 and 1937, felt the rising heat of war and conquest fever, looked at and listened to the Nazis and Hitler in action. Actually it was no great trick at the time to know that war was coming. Everyone in Europe apparently did.

If the germ of this story began with the little aero club at Salcombe it received impetus from the Walter Mitty in me.

Surely you have read Mr James Thurber's character Walter Mitty, whose fantasy life was led as a hero in many fields. The Mitty stories come as a great relief to me for up to that time I was unaware that anyone else shared this kind of infantile madness.

I should really be ashamed to confess these puerile fantasies which began in boyhood, but for the fact that time and again they have swum into my consciousness when I have needed them and I have been able to adapt them commercially.

I have, in imagination, rescued enough beautiful maidens from villains to staff a beauty chorus, I have been the boy wonder who disarms the bandit chief in the great train robbery, earning the undying gratitude of the passengers, the young lieutenant who holds the salient and saves the day, the sea captain, grim-lipped, who brings his ship through the tempest, Robin Hood, Ivanhoe, and d'Artagnan all rolled into one.

What is embarrassing to report is that some of these daydreams persisted into adult life. And this is where I welcomed the advent of Thurber's Mr Mitty to save my face, for during the early days of sports writing when I made frequent use of air transport in hurrying from city to city to cover major sports events, the flying hero daydream went something like this:

I am sitting in a transport plane minding my own business when suddenly I look up into the pilot's cockpit and see that both pilots have slumped unconscious in their seats and the plane is unguided and may crash at any moment. Or as a more attractive variation there was the sudden appearance of the pretty hostess of the aeroplane—and they were always prime beauts on those

airlines – looking pale and frightened, yet trying to be calm as she inquires ‘Is there anyone among the passengers who can fly an aeroplane?’ There has been an accident. Both pilot and co-pilot are unconscious. Oh, who will save us?’

Casually I hold up my hand ‘Don’t fear, miss I can fly a ship I’ll get us down’ To the murmurs of admiration from the other passengers, I go forward to the pilot’s cabin, remove the body of the unconscious pilot (don’t ask me how the two men got unconscious at the same time, because I never bothered to work that one out) with the aid of the beautiful hostess, who by now is hopelessly in love with me. A few moments of experimenting to familiarise myself with the gadgets on the dashboard and I am in full control, heading for the nearest airport. I cut the throttles, I glide, I approach. Thump! We land and roll safely to a stop. I have done it!

Now the relieved and grateful passengers crowd around ‘Hurrah for Gallico, who saved us all!’ Reporters dash up and the dramatic tale is quickly told. The officials of the airlines reward me with a cash bonus which I modestly turn aside while the headlines roll from the presses.

‘HEROIC SPORTS WRITER LANDS TRANSPORT PLANE SAFELY AFTER PILOTS PASS OUT IN MID-AIR, Amateur Flier Saves Lives of All Aboard’ Also ‘Photo shows courageous writer with pretty hostess, surrounded by cheering passengers’

I do not insist that a person needs to be quite that idiotic to write and sell fiction stories, but it helps.

There was one serious catch to my full enjoyment of this childish daydream, and that was that I couldn’t fly an aeroplane. And just imagining that I could didn’t seem to be enough. The dream world and the world of reality seemed to merge here and drive me to action. Suppose some day something like that really should happen.

What actually moved me to take up the art, however, were the practical considerations. I thought that every modern man ought to be able to fly an aeroplane just as he was able to drive a car. I thought it would be good to write about in my sports column. I also had a notion that some day I would be able to cover certain sports events from the air, and which indeed later came to pass when I took up my own plane over Newport to cover the American Cup Yacht race and over Detroit the speed-boat matches between Gar Wood and Kaye Don.

Leland Hayward the producer, then an agent, was himself taking flying lessons at the time. He put me on to his instructor

Swanee Taylor and I began my training on a Kittyhawk, soloed in due time and took my licence

The pangs and joys of learning were duly reported in my daily sports column. Flying in those days was still supposed to be 'dangerous'. With my helmet and goggles I thought of myself as the very devil of a fellow. The kite that I flew could achieve a speed of circa 75 miles an hour with an enormous amount of fuss and bother and clatter and nearly shaking itself to pieces. In those days war planes were flying at 200 and 300 miles an hour and the prototype of the Hawker Hurricane was to crack the 400 miles an hour barrier. I knew an American navy flyer by the name of Al Williams who took me up on one of those speed flights in a navy war plane. This experience was packed away in my mental attic. When the idea for 'Penntifer's Plan' came to me there it was ready to be used, my own personal experience in the difference in the speeds of aircraft and what might well be the result of such a difference.

PENNTIFER'S PLAN is not the story of a little boy who rescues grown-ups from danger in mid-air. It is the story of an English butcher of Plympsmore, South Devon, who loved the soil to which he was born and bred. But it's there all right, the daydream, and you will not have to look hard to recognise it in its present guise.

I used to drive to Plymouth once a week to do my shopping. The great port and the surrounding countryside were drenched in sentiment and romance for me. I loved to wander along the Hoe or walk the older alleys and streets of the grey city. And I remember one day, when I was in the big market, thinking of the war that was coming and what it would do to this quiet town and its people, the butchers' stalls, and the greengrocers in their long white coats, the old women with their shopping bags, and how it would look when the bombs began to fall.

In 1944 when I went abroad as war correspondent and European editor of 'Cosmopolitan' magazine I visited Plymouth and looked in vain for any of the old landmarks I had known. Woolworths had gone, the market-stalls, Spooners, Great Department Store of the West, my old butcher shop where I used to trade, everything had been wiped out and I thought again of the story I had written called PENNTIFER'S PLAN. A cut version of it had appeared in 'Cosmopolitan' magazine in 1938, but recently rummaging through my effects I came across a carbon copy of the original story and this I would be pleased to have you read.

I do not think the truth or fallacy of the mechanics of the final battle in the tale are important. It was still a curiously accurate forecast of the Battle of Britain, which saved England as surely

as the little wooden sailing ships of Drake and the men who manned them saved her in the days of Elizabeth I It has to do with men more than aeroplanes, for we know today that the lads who took the Spits and Hurricanes into the sky to challenge and beat the Luftwaffe were the same kind of people as the men and boys of Penntifer's crazy, patchwork Armada They performed miracles of gallantry and tenacity far transcending their machines They were stubborn, liberty-loving Britishers Which is what this story is about

PENNTIFER'S PLAN

The tragic disaster that overtook England in the early autumn of 1938 came to the attention of John Penntifer, butcher, of Plympton in Devon, chiefly through the neatly clipped sentences and impersonal voice of the British Broadcasting Corporation announcer, except for one important episode where he happened to be an eye-witness But this exception and its important consequences will be dealt with later It was from the interior of the box of his seven-guinea wireless set that Penntifer learned of the thing that had happened to England, and of the new method of making war, which was not war at all in the old accepted sense, but rather a more convenient form of international piracy and blackmail, nicely glossed over with a diplomatic language and phrases that made Penntifer snort

Even when he told of the practically total destruction of the British air pursuit and combat fleet, sent up in a mad scramble to intercept the combined bombing fleet of the two powers that had appeared at five o'clock one Friday afternoon over London, and with no warning had simply up-ended hell's cauldron out of the sky, the announcer never permitted itself more than the respectable tincture of apprehension and regret worked out for the phrase 'Is dangerously ill . ' And used for the SOS messages that always preceded the late news, copyright reserved 'Will Mary Blagdon, last heard of at 347 Clacton Road, Walton-on-Thames, go to 19 Tinsley Road, Manchester, where her mother, Mrs Albert J Blagdon, is dangerously ill? . '

The same quiet, even phrasing and polite regret - 'It was some time before a sufficient force of British combat planes could

be mustered and sent aloft to engage the obviously' (precious word) 'hostile bombers, and when this was finally done, they found themselves set upon, outnumbered, and outdistanced by a new type of fighting plane apparently lurking on a higher level than the bombers'

The announcer (he was talking from the Regional Station in Surrey, because the B B C building in London had been blown to rubble) found time to comment on an unfortunate oversight of the Air Ministry that became evident when the British fighters went aloft. It developed that the English machines, thought to be the fastest and most modern in the world, were fifteen miles an hour behind the aircraft of the two powers, yards slower on the climb, and not so powerfully armed. The result of this was that of the machines answering the belated alarm and leaving their aerodromes, not one quarter returned, and of these not more than a third were undamaged and fit to fly. In the meantime the lazy, circling bombers were reducing five London areas to powder, twisted metal, and junk, while pieces of the dead lay strewn in the pitted streets, or hung from chunks of blasted mortar, or were shredded against whatever walls were left standing. The first estimates placed the civilian dead at more than one hundred thousand. The loss in R A F planes and pilots was appalling.

The announcer continued. 'Late yesterday evening the Ambassadors of the two powers called upon Leslie Spanka-Winwold and denied that their countries were at war with Great Britain or that the outrageous attack upon London was intended as an act of war. In a statement prepared jointly by the two Ambassadors and handed to Mr Spanka-Winwold they said: "The unfortunate liquidation of certain portions of London, and other cities that are to follow, does not of necessity indicate an abandonment of the principles of world peace to which the two undersigned powers have always been dedicated, but instead may be regarded as a token of their sincerity in their effort to obtain what they consider a necessary re-balance of power throughout western Europe. The immediate abandonment of the English position with regard to the recent developments in Russia, France, and Spain as well as Brazil and the Argentine would see a resumption of the cordial and friendly relations that have always existed between the British peoples and those of the two powers. Nevertheless, in order to assist the British public in demanding that the Government reshape its policy, further rumor demonstrations of two-power solidarity are planned at key points of the British Isles.'

'Gaw,' said Penntifer 'What cheek!'

He listened to a partial estimate of the disaster due to bombing and fires, and the plans of a badly shaken Government for immediate defence of the country, a defence that even the carefully worded broadcast could not conceal was badly broken by the loss of half its aircraft and pilots

'Gaw,' said John Penntifer again, and for no particular reason consulted his watch. It had gone ten-thirty. He went downstairs into his shop and checked over his lists. Five areas in London were blackened, blood-drenched smudges, but that did not alter the fact that he would have to drive into Plymouth in the morning. The wholesalers wanted a ticking off. The beef had definitely been inferior. And there was also that matter of business for the Aero Club, of which he was the most enthusiastic member. Come rack or ruin, it all wanted doing, just the same.

He was a big, grave, placid man, was John Penntifer, butcher of Plympsmore, and not easily disturbed, but in him that night was a stirring anger that it should have happened, a feeling as though he had been cheated and let down. He was living, he had thought, under a system where that sort of thing was properly looked after. It was, he understood, a democracy, but a democracy that somehow always seemed to favour the rich and the titled so that they got into the seats of power and thereby managed to perpetuate their riches and their titles. This never bothered Penntifer so long as they ran things comfortably and smartly and left him enough shillings in the pound wherewith to taste and pursue the joys of leaving the ground on Sunday afternoon and propelling himself carefully around the airport, in grave, methodical circles, and plunking himself back on the field again with sweetness and precision. His taxes, he knew, went for Government, and rearmament, and defence. But the message of terror and disaster that he had absorbed that evening reached through the staid placidity that was part of him and told him that he hadn't got his money's worth. The people who were supposed to be looking out for him, and whose business it was to stop the sort of thing that had happened, hadn't.

Before locking up, Penntifer went out into the narrow street where the grey stone houses had their doorsteps flush with the macadam road that was Fore Street while it ran through the little Devon village, but which, when it emerged, simply became Route B3212 from Exeter to Plymouth again.

It was a soft, glorious night, and the narrow band of sky that he could see across the slanting, slated roof-tops was milky white and shimmery with stars. The street was deserted. The inhabi-

tants of the village were indoors at their wireless sets. He looked up into the sky and listened intently. He thought that from far off and from no quarter that he could place he heard the thrumming of distant engines, and knew there were wings in the sky.

He stood there in the street, this large, solid man, coatless, in his collarless shirt and vest, and wearing his house slippers. A heavy gold watch-chain crossed from one pocket of his vest to another. His brownish hair, with just a touch of iron in it, was thick, and cut so that it lay across his brow, almost to his bushy eyebrows, in a sort of bang, and he had a short, drooping moustache that followed the complete curve of his upper lip. His eyes were large, placid, soft, and deep blue, and his complexion high and florid. He was as firm and big and solid as the beeves he quartered and carved and sold, but he was reaching to the stars. He was wishing that he could fly that night and join with the distant thrumming. He wondered how long it would be before he would be permitted to attempt night flying. Flight Lieutenant Handwie had been very encouraging about it. Lieutenant Handwie was his instructor, and the absolute czar, overlord, and god of the Plympsmore Aero Club. A sense of depression overwhelmed him as he remembered what had happened that day. Somewhere Handwie must be flying to the defence of England. He might never come back. One of the objects of driving into Plymouth and the next morning was to see about getting a room at a hotel where the Aero Club, in conjunction with the larger and more powerful Plymouth Aero Club, was to give a little surprise dinner to the lieutenant.

It was curious, but characteristic of Penntifer, that in his mind he never made any connection between the swift battle above the earth that had destroyed what remained of England's chivalry and aristocracy, the real flower of her youth, and paralysed her air power and defence, and his own flying. Air fights and steel machines that dove and wheeled and snarled and buzzed like furious wasps, that could go up like lifts, hanging from their airscrews, and thundered in to land at over a hundred miles an hour, were as completely beyond his ken as is the multi-cylindred, underslung, supercharged, and long-hooded racing automobile to the man who methodically drives his car about the highways, for work or pleasure.

John Penntifer, the Devon butcher, quite by accident had come upon a passion in middle life, and that passion was flying. It had begun when his friend Harry Pryne, the local radio engineer, had persuaded him to go for a hop in Plymouth one Sunday

afternoon Then John Penntifer had discovered that it was beyond neither his means nor his capabilities to learn to fly He took his licence And what was more, he founded and sat permanently in the chair of the Plympsore Aero Club, which boasted sixteen members and one aircraft

Penntifer's flying was as careful and placid and staid as his demeanour, and, in fact, as his appearance No one would ever have taken him for a qualified and licensed pilot except for his eyes, which were those of men who look into far spaces Many of John Penntifer's ancestors had been to sea in the way of Devon men But he flew by sheer determination and love of it, and almost constantly by the book He was heavy-footed on the rudder pedals and heavy-handed on the control stick - so much so that he had nearly driven Lieutenant Handwie to tears during the early instruction period, but even in his heavy way he had managed to pick up some of the rhythm of flying He couldn't etch a sweeping circle with his wing, but he could edge around it and get there eventually, and he was always terrifically precise about his work Handwie often wondered where Penntifer got his pleasure out of the sport because he was always so busy doing something with the plane - trimming a wing, or eyeing the gauges, or wiggling the stick But Penntifer was quite in heaven from the moment that he climbed into the cockpit and put his big, thick fingers on the throttle and settled his feet heavily on the rudder pedals

He flew a little Loddwell Gull She was a tiny grey biplane with a nice respectable wingspread She cruised at seventy-five miles an hour and had a top speed of eighty-five, and she was his love and his life, his dear lamb and his worship There were other planes which were the individual property of wealthier members, but the little grey Gull was owned by the club and therefore he had a share in her

You can see now why, at that time, there could not have possibly been any connection between John Penntifer on a Sunday afternoon, wearing his second-best suit of clothes, a black and grey stripe, with a leather jacket over his coat, and brown helmet and goggles, picking the Gull up off the field at Plymouth, where the club had its hangar, wheeling it twice around the airport, and setting it down again, or executing slightly squared figure eights, or spiralling down from two thousand feet in little jerks that bristled the nape hairs of real flyers, but which nevertheless brought him in to land without sideslipping or gunning over the wires - between that Penntifer and the war drums that throbbed in the upper skies John Penntifer had never in his life,

which comprised ninety-seven flying hours, been higher than five thousand feet

Once, just once, on a bright-starred and unforgettable day, he had been for a few minutes at the controls of a transport plane that had settled into Plymouth on charter, piloted by a friend of Lieutenant Handwie. The pilot had taken up Handwie and Penntifer and, on Handwie's recommendation, had permitted Penntifer to sit in the co-pilot's seat and take the controls. Penntifer handled the wheel as though it were the Chalice of Antioch, but when he laid his huge feet on the rudder pedals, he made a three-mile error, in spite of trying to pretend the rudder controls were made of eggshells. He was quite fascinated with the speed of the contraption, it was one of the first of the new English Douglasses, which could gallop smoothly at two hundred and ten. They fly like angels, but must be gentled at all times. When the pilot told him to raise the nose a little, he raised her a thousand feet before he realised it, and a smile curled his lip in spite of himself as he thought of the long struggle to hoist the Gull a thousand feet by climbing turns, his eyes glued to an apparently immovable altimeter needle.

The throbbing in the distance had died away. Penntifer went back inside. He gathered up his slippers, locked the shop doors, and went upstairs where his wife was standing white-faced with her hands folded over her stomach under her apron, gazing at the wireless with a puzzled, doubtful look on her face. She was a Devon woman, thin and dark-haired, with the inevitable moustache that seems to come to middle-aged English women in the country. But she had fine eyes. She had been a good wife to John Penntifer, and a good mother to their two girls and three boys. She disapproved in a negative way of her husband's flying, but merely from a normal reaction to the woman's instinct for self-protection, a sort of 'what-will-become-of-us-if-something-happens-to-you?' business. Secretly she was quite proud of her husband's ability to fly and his chairmanship of the Plymptmore Aero Club.

'He said everyone's to put out their lights because of the air-raid-ers,' she told him.

'Hum,' said Penntifer. 'Well, then, out with them. Though there'll be no danger here.'

They extinguished all the lights, and in the darkness Penntifer called up his friend Major Charterod, the land agent. Ordinarily, under the system in which Penntifer lived and was happy, he and the major would never have progressed beyond nodding acquaintance. The major was Indian Army, retired, though still

this side of fifty, a pukka major, D S O and all, and far removed from Penntifer by caste, even though he was working for a living now, selling houses and taking inventory But the flying had broken through that barrier Flyers are a race and people apart, somehow They recognise and respect something in common with one another The major, who was a little dried-up chap with a semi-bald head, and Penntifer were very fond of each other Their wives of course never met, because neither one of the women cared to shock the system to that extent, but the two men frequently sat together in the lounge of the Devon Arms and drank their pints of lukewarm bitter and discussed flying and their respective pets The major was more than a little partial to a low-wing Alpha monoplane that was practically a glider with a motor in it It would float for hours, coming in to land sometimes clear across the field It made for good talking

The two men had much to say to each other over the telephone, news to exchange The major, an ex-soldier and a more highly bred and sensitive person than Penntifer, was a mass of shock and nerves over the news He was applying in the morning for return to active service He had tried to telephone relatives in London, but Trunks reported that all exchanges except the South Kensington one were down News grew worse and more confused every hour The Government had not yet declared war on the two powers It was doubtful whether such a declaration meant anything anyway The fleet had been ordered home at once, and avoiding the Mediterranean route It was leaving the Empire wide open, but this was one time when the Empire must shift for itself

There was no precedent for what had happened England had been assaulted with a brutality and a ferocity that she had not experienced since the days of the Norman invasion Now she was like a prizefighter who had been away from the ring for a long time and who upon returning receives a frightful bash in the face at the first crack of the bell and finds himself sitting on the floor, sick, bleeding, and thoroughly addled

It was obvious that war must be declared, but equally obvious that an invasion of the land of the two powers was costly and impractical and now, in view of the danger to England, impossible Bombardment by the fleet might be a punishment, but the fleet could not be spared In times of stress England, drawing on the skeins that stretched over the world, pulled her fleet about her like an old lady settling her shawl about her neck to keep out the damp More obvious still was reprisal by air One of the two-power capitals was three hours away by fast bomber But

two thirds of the British combat fleet had been smashed in the first surprise attack from the air, rent, split and shattered earthwards, by hordes of silver wings that simply cascaded out of the higher levels, like hot steel out of a furnace, crackling and spitting and blasting. And a hundred and thirty-eight of the largest and fastest bombers had been destroyed in their hangars near Swindon.

England was as vulnerable as one of those fragile, long-legged spiders with no sting. For this was neither war nor ordinary piracy. It was gangsterism, raised to the *n*th, or international, degree. The two powers had simply expanded their internal policies and methods and applied them on a large scale. They had in effect used the technique of the American gangster's version of the half-strength black powder bomb tossed over the transom to wreck the room inside without too much damaging the inhabitants thereof, and accompanied by a note: 'This is to let you know what we want. If we don't get it, the next one will be filled with dynamite.' This was blackmail on a magnificent scale, with the price as yet concealed by diplomatic verbiage, but with the victim to be put in the mood to yield, no matter what the price. By the time anyone could come to her assistance it would be too late. England at that moment needed a breather and a chance to recover. That was exactly what the Intelligence of the two powers intended she should not have. She was a tough old muscle and, once she had staggered through the first round, might last out the fight.

Penntifer told the major he was driving in to Plymouth in the morning, but that he would see him when he returned if the major had not already gone up to London. Under the circumstances the little dinner to Lieutenant Handwie would probably not take place, but at any rate he ought to talk it over with the chairman of the Plymouth Aero Club.

The broadcasting stopped promptly at twelve. Not that there was not still news and horror aplenty to retail to the shocked ears of Englishmen. But the broadcasting always stopped at midnight, with the tolling of Big Ben. And so because it always had stopped before, it did on that night too. England was something like that. Only there was no chiming of twelve strokes by Big Ben that evening, because the two powers' Intelligence had struck at tradition as well as depots, and Big Ben was a tangle of crumpled steel and wheels and spindles, a clotted mass of wreckage that somehow hung, a little obscenely by two or three still unsevered cables, from the naked front of the split and shattered tower.

John Penntifer and his wife went to bed together as they always had for many years, but Penntifer did not sleep well that night. His stolid nerves were as steady as ever, but his soul was uneasy. He could not have put it that way, exactly, but he had been hurt because England had been hurt. There were not many countries left where you could get at the hearts of its people through rocks and soil, where men were rooted like the mandrake.

In the morning Penntifer did the chores of opening his shop, saw that his apprentice clerk was capable of dealing with requirements of the day, backed his little Morris out of the garage, and drove the seven miles to Plymouth, through Plympton, Yealmpton, over the bridge where the grey town sprawled over its hills in front of him.

The Morris was old and rattly and carried its own commotion along the street with it so that Penntifer never heard the high-up drumming in the heavens, the high, throbbing drumming that was spreading like a canopy over the upper levels, the unseen levels of the upper sky. He was driving down Tavistock Street, on his way to the meat market, his attention focused on his driving and the traffic in the grey street.

But at Old Town Street, which he had to cross, the traffic was against him and he had to stop in moody contemplation of the back of the bobby turned to him, arms outstretched like a scarecrow, his white-gloved hands sticking out of the end of his sleeves. His motor was only idling, and so, in common with the people on the street, he now heard the bombs thudding and blasting into Devonport, straight ahead, and the shriek and whine of the anti-aircraft shells as the batteries opened their hopeless fire.

All the people on the street stopped stock-still and listened and froze, looking skyward, and it was just as though a film had been suddenly stopped and all the busily moving objects on the screen had become an inanimate magic-lantern slide. When the policeman turned to permit traffic to cross Old Town Street, nothing moved except at the very end – John Penntifer, who crossed and continued on to the meat market, where he had to tick a man off because he had been sending inferior meats. In his ears was the sharp ‘spang-spang-spang’ of anti-aircraft rifle fire, and the grandiose, periodic ‘ka-ta-KLUNG!’ of heavy air bombs slamming home. His mind played with the phrasing that had come slipping so smoothly out of his wireless set. ‘Further minor demonstrations of two-power solidarity are planned at key points of the British Isles.’

Penntifer parked his car just outside the wholesale meat district

and entered the half circle of the meat market, a street lined on both sides with open shops in which hung whole bullocks and sheep, halves and quarters of pork, and lambs, still unskinned, and the butchers in their bloody white aprons moved about with knives in their hands, past counters heaped with tripe or dark-red livers. But the knives were out of their hands, and the butchers were running, seizing one another by the arm and shoulder, and pointing skywards, and all chins were pointing out at right-angles, and necks were stretched until one saw the stubble hairs against the red skin.

John Penntifer looked up too, and in the small patch visible above their heads he saw little white cotton-wool puff balls and then, later, black and yellow bursts, and shivering lines of smoke that spread falling fingers from the coronas of the explosions in the air. Too, he saw something streak earthwards in a comet of smoke, and another of the same, and disappear, and the high drumming was in his ears, but he began to have a queer sense of confusion and instability as though things were no longer very greatly to be relied upon, and that which he knew for reality took on a much more dreamlike quality than ever before.

The butchers should have been standing behind their counters, or running their knives down the halves or sides of beef, or fishing down in vats for pickled tongues, or weighing honeycomb tripe, instead of running about their half circle of a street, craning their necks skywards and reaching for one another.

The butchers should have been standing behind their counters, weighing out ribs or rumps of beef, instead of rolling in the stained and bloody gutters, holding their heads, rolling over and over, and the long sides of beef and mutton should have been suspended from their large, sharp hooks instead of lying in the gutter with the rolling butchers and the two old women dressed in black with their skirts over their heads and their white underwear showing.

John Penntifer too was rolling in the gutter, with his bowler hat crushed down over his eyes. The big, stained cobblestones were very close to his eyes sometimes, and then again they were distant, and the houses and the butcher stalls were spinning around as though they were all nailed to cardboard and had a pin through them.

Because of the pain and the singing in his head, John Penntifer could remember little how he had come to be in the gutter with the meat and the butchers when a moment before he had been standing looking skywards at the little white puff balls and the sulphurous yellow and black shoots and wavy fingers of smoke,

but as his head cleared a little, he did remember or rather was dimly conscious of there having been an abysmal and cataclysmic noise, as though a panel of sheet iron, a mile square, had been struck a violent blow with a hammer the size of a battleship.

He picked himself up on his feet, and although he could manage to stand, when he tried to walk he teetered and swayed as though he were dead drunk. But he set off in the direction that an instinct told him had been the origin of the great sound.

He was walking along East Street behind Old Town and all the shops and Woolworth's. There were no windows at all anywhere any more, and he could look right into Woolworth's and see the welter of women lying on the floor, and those who were standing, fingering their faces with puzzled looks, puzzled because the fingers came away so red.

Penntifer walked on without knowing why or where, turning left at the corner, and so coming back into Old Town Street, close to the corner of Bedford Street where had stood the five-storey building of Spooner & Company, known as the Department Store of the West. The big demolition bomb had scored a direct hit in the centre of the department store crowded with women and children at their morning shopping, which was why it was no longer there except for one fractured wall that had not toppled into the street and a pyre of dust and powdered plaster that was rising out of the horrible bubbling cauldron that had been the centre of the store and that was now a hole in which weltered living and dead human beings and fragments thereof, stone, plaster, glass, beams, and merchandise.

One wall had been blown right into Old Town Street, where Penntifer now picked his way, flattening out small cars and people as though they had passed beneath a steam roller, wrecked two buses that were passing, killing everyone in them, and smashed the windows and façades of the shops on the opposite side of the street. Old Town Street was knee-deep in broken glass, rubble, twisted steel, and bodies. A picric acid stench hung heavily in the air with the settling dust, and after the appalling blast of the bomb the silence was even more dreadful, because there were no longer any noises of heavy buses and motor cars and clanging trams, and the shuffle of many shod feet on pavements or bells of bicycle-riders. The only sounds in the streets were soft dripping sounds and the moans and cries of people who were not yet dead.

Penntifer was a butcher by trade, and therefore used to blood and bone and meat, but the dead and the dying in the streets, among their own fragments, made him sick, and he turned away

retching and fled as quickly as he could up Old Town Street, leaving the sights and the sounds behind him, until by a slightly roundabout way he came back to where he had parked his car. It was intact except that the rear window was blown in. When he got in and pressed the starter button, it came to life. Another explosion shook the earth, but it was farther away. Nevertheless, Penntifer's system could stand no more shocks. He was as close to panic and nervous disintegration as such a solid, stolid unimaginative man could come. He jammed the car into gear, turned it around, headed north along Notte Street to avoid any piled-up traffic on the road he had come, turned down Hoegate Street, and thence east and back into Tavistock Street, out over the ten-mile-an-hour bridge, and up the long hill into the open country, where for the first time he could even make an attempt to marshal his thoughts. The gunfire had died away, and the explosions too. When he reached the top of the hill, he turned around and looked back before driving around the bend that would from then on hide the sprawling red-roofed town of Plymouth. He counted nine columns of smoke rising from different sections of the city, and in one spot he could see shoots of orange flame through the black smoke. He looked back no more, but sent the car around the corner and over the brow of the hill, and inside of a minute he was driving through the soothing greens and greys and terracotta reds of the Devon countryside.

His eyes were on the cool green of the fields divided by their grey walls, a soft old grey, the same as that in the houses and the roofs of the houses, and on cows that grazed and switched their tails, on the high green hedges that bordered the road, and on an occasional thick, whitewashed cottage with an old thatched roof. Sometimes he drove past a farmer ploughing up the red earth or turning under the remains of a crop, with white gulls walking stiff-legged behind him in the furrows, white gulls, and black rooks, mingling for the leavings. He passed through little wooded spots, where the boles of the old beeches were smooth and ancient and glistening, grey-green in colour, moss-patched, and all the branches intertwined overhead, and one knew that those trees had been there a long, long time.

He was thinking at that moment of another line in the statement of the Ambassadors: 'The unfortunate liquidation of certain portions of London and other cities in Great Britain that is to follow.'

The word 'liquidation' brought a literal picture to his literal mind: 'to make liquid.' He thought with deep distress of the drip-dripping he had heard on Old Town Street after the

explosion Men and women had been made liquid He pressed the accelerator harder and the little car complained and clanked But he was again close to panic to get home He was not a demonstrative man, but he wanted to see his wife and his children and lay his hands on them and feel their skins whole and solid and know that they had not been made into liquid

But the road, and the fields and orchards, and little wooded spots, and patchwork countryside of corn and grain, and greens were all solid and peaceful, and a powerful anodyne to his shocked and battered nerves There they were There they were as he had always seen and remembered them With a sinking pang he thought of them blowing up as Spooner's, the Department Store of the West, had blown up, trees cracked, and splintered walls, torn and broken, and the pleasant fields blackened and erupted

No two men's patriotism is the same, or hinges upon the same images To John Penntifer, this was England, the meadows, the hillsides, the warm, terracotta-coloured earth, the remnant of olden forests with their trees that had been young when men in armour were old, the solid houses, and the winding roads sunk low beneath the parallel walls of green hedgerows that in the spring were dotted yellow with primrose, and in the summer crimson with poppy.

It was neither London nor Plymouth nor particularly his own grey house, except for the multicoloured garden kept up by his wife, that was England to John Penntifer It was this land Cities rose and fell, and came and went, but the land stayed as it was, the hills and the hedges and the grass and the trees, and he could feel so old, so one with their antiquity Sometimes he felt as though he wanted to stand in that soil, rooted like a tree, with his legs buried to his knees, so that he could feel a part of it He passed a grey lichen-covered wall that ran along the side of the road and ended in an old tollhouse, nearly hidden by climbing ivy When Simon Penntyfer, the boatswain on the *Silver Blade*, one of Drake's ships that had fought against the Spanish Armada, had come ashore at Plymouth after the battle and had walked up this road, he had seen the same old tollhouse and the same hills All this ground had been lived over, walked over, and bled over for so long He was English by absorption from the soil As his name had grown from the Norman Pontefiere to English Penntifer, so had he grown out of that land So that land, as he drove through it, filled his heart with love and a deep yearning to shield and protect it.

No one would have known those things were going on inside

John Penntifer because, being middle-aged and married and respectable and, above all, the butcher of Plympsore, he was not supposed to have things going on inside of him beyond a knowledge of the quotation of beef and mutton and a neighbourly interest in the customers who came into his shop. But then nobody ever knew for certain what went on inside of people. Certainly no one, not even a very profound man, could have managed to correlate the hash of vagrant thoughts and isolated ideas, and stray wisps of imagination, and little unrelated bits of stubbornness, plus a number of vague ideas about aerodynamics, that eventually gave rise to what in conception and later in execution became known simply as Penntifer's Plan.

The plan was already buzzing around the inside of John Penntifer's head, the head with its droopy thatch that was so like in colour and conformation to the thatch on the roof of the Devon cottage as he drove home that terrible morning, through Yealmpton and Plympton, towards Plympsore. Or rather pieces of it were like parts of a picture puzzle that one knows belongs to other parts, or suspects might fit, and so lays aside until they shall be wanted. Some of the pieces were just sentences that he planned to use in his address to the Aero Club when he called the meeting, such as 'General Joffre used taxicabs to save Verdun'. He was not sure either of General Joffre or the Verdun part, but he was certain about the taxicabs. Or 'The Spanish Armada appeared off the coast of England exactly three hundred and fifty years ago, in 1588, and Simon Penntyfer sailed out of Plymouth aboard the *Silver Blade*, Captain, Sir Hector Dowson'.

The butcher drove slowly down the one street of Plympsore where the doorsteps of the grey houses reached to the edge of the road, and turned his car down the little alley into the garage behind the store. He went upstairs to his home over the shop, where he found his dark-haired wife sitting in the living-room with the children about her, the two girls and the three boys. They all looked grave and puzzled. They were listening to their wireless set, as Penntifer and his wife had listened to it the night before. The daily programme had been suspended. Only news came out of the polished and fluted little box. And all the news was appalling.

What Penntifer had managed to live through at Plymouth, was the practical extermination of the surviving parts of Great Britain's air fleet. The two English naval bases - Portsmouth and Devonport - had been attacked simultaneously and the naval air arm wiped out. The *Queen Mary* had been sunk at her dock.

Again the technique had been the same as had been used in the opening raid on London. The bombers blasted the open towns. When the British flyers took the air, the two-power fighters that had been in ambush above the bombers dived on them and wiped them out. They had speed and numbers on the English. Three thousand died in Southampton, three thousand seven hundred in Plymouth. Then the two attacking wings, one in the west, the other in the east of England, headed north and began to converge. They left destruction and carnage at Bristol, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Hull, and Leeds before they turned eastwards again and flew out to sea and vanished. And by that time there was nothing left on wings in all England capable of pursuing them.

The announcer said in his well-modulated voice, still tinged with accents of regret: 'The Air Ministry neither wishes nor is able to conceal from the British people that it has suffered a disaster of the first magnitude, in the failure of the remaining war craft to render any opposition to the raiders, and in the eventual destruction of nearly all the British planes participating in the defence of the nation. Other plans for the defence and safety of those living in danger zones are maturing and will be revealed as soon as they have reached the practical stage.'

A later bulletin said: 'His Majesty the King has been in conference with his Ministers since late last night. His Majesty shed tears unashamedly when apprised of the toll of dead and dying among his subjects.'

At this point John Penntifer wept a little too. He loved and felt a little ashamed of his helpless King, who sat with his Ministers and cried when they told him what was happening to the human beings who were technically his subjects and for whose welfare he was equally technically responsible.

The tears shed for him by his King touched Penntifer, but they did nothing to assuage the uneasiness in his soul. A king who wept for his people was a good and kind king who inspired love and picture-postcard loyalty. Somehow, those drops of salty water dripped from glands in the skull that the year before had been anointed as royal and holy symbolised to Penntifer the things that had gone out of British leadership, the toughness and the swiftness and the ruthlessness of the barons and lords and royalties of the days of his ancestors, the seagoing and land-roving Simons and Abels and Peters and Harrys, Penntyfers all, who followed leaders and whose leaders took them to where there was trouble and then did something trenchant about it.

From what Penntifer could make of the death lists, a lot of

the shoots from the old family trees had been nipped in the disaster to the air fleet He shook his head The old ones were soft Many of the young ones were dead His plan came rushing back to him and swirled around inside his head, where it burned and buzzed and made his heart beat faster and his breath come quicker The impossibility or impracticability of it never dawned upon him, but that was mainly because he never quite saw it very far towards fruition, even in his own mind That is, he could not quite see what would happen *after* the plan was once in operation All his thoughts were occupied in getting it into operation, and what finally crystallised him into steady, stubborn, accumulative action that was undeniable and unstoppable because of the fundamental simplicity and strength of the man's person and character was a bulletin read into the microphone by the B B C announcer, which issued forth to fall upon the ears of John Penntifer, butcher of Plympsmore, England, and his wife and his dearly beloved five children

In sum and substance it was this The two powers' Ambassadors had again paid a visit to Whitehall – the bulletin neglected to describe the fact that they wore morning coats and silk hats, carried umbrellas in approved English style, and smiled broadly At Whitehall they left another note from their governments, in which demands were crystallised And even to one as ill-versed in international diplomacy as John Penntifer, the scope of the débâcle of the English air arm was made all the plainer by the tenor and nature of the demands In addition to certain political changes on Great Britain's influence in western Europe, the two powers made the demand that quite evidently was what had really inspired the raids Briefly, it was that Great Britain retire bag and baggage, wholly and completely, from her Empire in the East

Her holdings were to be divided between the two powers

Had one been anywhere off the coast of England at that moment, one might almost have heard the gasp that arose, house by house, from the shocked nation gathered around its loud-speakers

The diplomatic language of the note maundered on ' more equitable distribution of latitude for expansion a redistribution of territories more in line with the new nationalism and the rights of rejuvenated nations and peoples three-day period permitted for ingestion and dissemination . no further liquidations or demonstrations deemed necessary during that period . However, at the close of the seventy-two hours, unless the Government shows a willingness to comply with the

demand of the English people to accede to the wishes of the two-power Governments, then a further period of liquidation of the English people may be expected to ensue immediately, this time untempered by mercy and the purely demonstrative nature of the earlier manifestations, and in its effects such that the Government would not be able to avoid a popular uprising designed to install a government more favourable to the peaceful and forward-looking aims of the two powers'

'Coo,' said Mrs Nancy Penntifer 'What's it all mean?'

John Penntifer had learned a lot since the night before 'It means we have three days to get out of Africa, India, and Australia If we don't agree, they'll come back and blow us all to pieces City by city County by county They can do it now We have no more defence from the air'

He stopped and thought for a moment And then he suddenly contradicted himself 'No, by God, they cannot They cannot'

He went to the telephone and rang up Major Charterod's office and inquired of his assistant who answered 'Has the major gone up to London yet? This is Penntifer speaking'

'No He's here I'll put him on'

The major came on the telephone 'Ah Are you all right, old man? I heard you'd got back from Plymouth We heard the explosions It's terrible They're completely disorganised up in London'

John Penntifer said 'Yes. Yes Thank you. Look here, Major I want you to call a meeting of the Aero Club at once' The major was the honorary secretary

'Eh? What? Oh, look here, John This is no time for Aero Club meetings Those matters before the committee will simply have to wait until such time as . '

'No, no,' said Penntifer 'I want - as chairman, I must insist upon a full membership meeting at once If you will get some of the members on the telephone, I will ring the rest Let us have it in your office Let us not delay an instant There is so little time Seventy-two hours Hurry up, Major, I beg of you'

'You are in earnest, John? You have something of importance to say to us?'

'Of the greatest importance Call the meeting, Major. If you will notify the upper half of the list, I will do so for the bottom half Everyone must attend. Let us say at two o'clock'

The Plympsomore Aero Club, Mr John Penntifer, chairman, Major Wesley Charterod, honorary secretary, Mr Frank Goodhue, honorary treasurer, met at Major Charterod's office at two o'clock that afternoon. There was a full attendance with the

exception of Mr Prindy, the stationer, who was off on holiday. They all came from their work, in the costumes of their trades. Art Derry had come over from Cooper's garage in his greasy overalls, his face grease-stained. There were Harry Pryne, the young radio engineer who had introduced Penntifer to flying, and Mr Ambrose Abbott, the surgeon. Frank Adams, who owned the little sweet shop in Fore Street, and the shy, unobtrusive Alvin Hamby, the local solicitor and commissioner of oaths. There were Colonel Atkey, retired, who owned the fast little cabin ship, a Turnley Eaglet, Peter Ellis, who owned the boat-builder's and was therefore the wealthiest man in the village and who had added to the club's roster of ships the Atcherly Rook, the low-winged two-seater monoplane, the one that Major Charterod so liked to fly, and Arnold Attray, one of the big laundry people, who owned the remaining plane, a fairly fast Collidine Linnet, a sports model.

They all sat around solemnly on camp chairs provided by the major, all fifteen of them. And John Penntifer sat in the centre, at the head of a long table, in his going-to-Plymouth clothes, just as he had returned that morning.

Penntifer rapped on the table with the gavel that was his beloved badge of office and cleared his throat. He then said 'I pronounce this meeting open,' and cleared his throat again. Mr Hamby very softly said 'Hear, hear!' as though he were just practising, in a manner warming it up for later use.

'With your permission,' said Penntifer, 'we will dispense with the reading of the minutes of the last meeting.' He looked around him and took note of the affirmative nods. The little company was waiting and electric with anticipation. All of them showed signs of the strain they had been under since the attacks on the country had begun, and particularly the terrible disaster at Plymouth, so close to home. Penntifer could feel that they were looking to him to explain the reason for calling a meeting of an amateur flying society, organised for sport and pleasure, at a time when each felt that his shrift might be very short. He wanted to rise up and blurt out his plan, the idea that had been buzzing and burning inside his head, tell them all, ask them what they thought, force them into seeing it as he did, compel them to take action, so that the plan might have a chance to work before it was too late.

But that was not the English way of doing it, and John Penntifer, for all the absurd, impossible, impractical romanticism of his plan, was essentially British. Had he been French he would have been a firebrand, kindling his associates to his own

temper, rallying them, pleading, exhorting But as it was, he sat with his hands on the table before him, gazed at the tense men out of his light-blue eyes, and nibbled for a moment at a strand of his moustache before he said 'Unfinished business Ah - with reference to the committee's report It has been suggested by the honorary secretary that this be tabled at the present moment, due to the urgency of the measures it is proposed to put before you'

Mr Hamby said 'Hear, hear,' and Mr Adams, who always seconded any proposals, said 'Second?'

Colonel Atkey, who was inclined to be testy, said 'Yes, yes, yes Come, come, get on with it, man What is it you have brought us here to propose?'

All of the members looked shocked, and Mr Hamby said severely 'Order'

With a calm that he did not feel, John Penntifer said imperturbably

'Ah Then - new business I have asked the honorary secretary to call this special meeting——' he paused All his resolve and courage fled His plan to save England was an utter imbecility All of the jargon that had whirled through his head on the trip home - Spanish Armada, taxicabs to Verdun five-mile error

hare and tortoise - recurred to him, and he wondered if he had gone mad, whether the shock of the bursting bomb close by in Plymouth had not deranged him Now that the moment had come, his carefully rehearsed speech left him and in its place remained only terror He wished desperately that he had talked his plan over with Major Charterod before calling the meeting. But he hadn't His mind groped for some subterfuge, something else he could tell them But he could think of none

And then, as suddenly as it had come, his panic was gone His plan was clear and simple to his eyes Only his method of telling about it changed somewhat He cleared his throat and said 'Ah - gentlemen, the recent events have shocked you all deeply They have shocked me beyond words The things that I have seen, this vurry day And now, as you have no doubt 'eard, we are asked to give up what we 'old in to the east, a part of the Empire, as the price for being let off further attacks' He paused again, and then said very simply and directly, so that it seemed as though he had asked the question individually of each man 'Is there any here among you who would not willingly die for what's right?'

Harry Pryne laughed a bitter little laugh and said 'Looks like a lot of us might be gon' to whether we liked it or not If friend

Penntifer has any quicker way than sittin' around waiting to be blown to pieces, I'm for it'

Mr Hamby said 'Hear, hear!'

Penntifer continued 'Our air force upon which we depended for protection has been destroyed There's neither ships nor men to fly them The best machines and the best pilots are gone, I 'eard it over the wireless So now, between shame, or the death of England, and maybe the death of us all, and our families, stands only - us'

All the men looked up 'Eh?' said old Colonel Atkey - 'us? Who is us? What are you driving at, man?'

Penntifer turned his light eyes on him 'Why, just us,' he replied, 'us as is 'ere, and in Plymouth and Bristol and Leeds and Manchester, us as is wherever there's a landing field and a wind sock and a machine to fly Us is the private, amatchoor pilots of Great Britain There's eighty-seven hundred of us I've seen the register. There's fifty-four hundred odd machines private-owned, not countin' them as belongs to the commercial lines Now, I have a plan And here it is'

All the men in the room scraped their chairs forward a little closer and leaned towards the table John Penntifer began to speak again

When he had done, Colonel Atkey sniffed and said 'Impossible. I never listened to such utter rot in all my days' Mr Hamby started to say 'Hear, hear,' but checked himself out of loyalty to Penntifer

The other men were silent, looking now at the butcher of Plymsmore, who had risen to his feet from the very earnestness of his speech and who stood before them now solid, respectable, everyday, with his heavy gold watch-chain crossing the dark expanse of his broadcloth vest like a harbour chain His moustache drooped and his half-grizzled hair fell across his brow He was their solid, undemonstrative chairman It seemed incredible that this fantastic idea had issued from his lips

There he stood, sweating a little, stolid, uninspiring The things he had said, the plan he had advanced, had not imbued his listeners with either belief or confidence. Colonel Atkey thought that he read the temper of the meeting and said 'Pah! Twaddle! I didn't come here to be made a fool of'

John Penntifer spoke again, and it was as though a voice had been given to an oak tree and was issuing forth from its gnarled depths And as he spoke, he made probably the first and only gesture he had ever made when talking to a group of men Not at all knowing that he was doing it, he took one hand from his

pocket and held it out before him, open, curled a little, palm upward

'But there's only us left,' he said. He said it with a deep, wonderful simplicity as though in his ears was the cracking of all doom and still he wished to interpose his body as a shield and take first the brunt of what was to come. 'There's only us left as can get up off the ground and fight. Who'll take up a plane with me?'

The power of leadership fell like a red, swirling cape over his broad, black-clad shoulders. The aura of leadership began to leap from his body like hertzian waves from a great broadcast unit. All the heads of the men sitting around the table came up with a jerk and a snap as though they had suddenly heard the call of distant trumpets. Harry Pryne, the radio engineer, answered him. He had a thin, nervous, sulky face. 'I don't give a damn. I'll take up a ruddy plane and fly the wings off of her. I'd just as soon go that way as get picked off like a sitting bird.'

'Hear, hear,' said Mr Hamby, and John Penntifer warmed to it. 'The others,' he said, 'we must tell the others. Get 'em on the telephone. There's not much time. Who'll ring Fred Bereo of the Plymouth Club? Perhaps the lines are down.'

It was Major Charterod who reached back over his shoulder, took his telephone off his desk, and rang the number of the Plymouth Aero Club. When he was put through, he told Fred Bereo, the secretary, of John Penntifer's plan.

There was a queer excitement in the secretary's voice. He said, 'Several of us are dead. I'll call a meeting of those I can get, at once. We'll telephone you.'

The plan was quite clear and simple to the major now. He asked, 'Who do you correspond with?'

'Corryge in Cardiff, and a man named Allen in Bristol. They're both good clubs.'

'Get through to them, old man, and start them on this. Time is so short.'

'Right-ho, old man.'

Penntifer's Plan was already seeping, spreading out over England when John Penntifer, suddenly shocked by his parliamentary impropriety in the face of a great crisis, was putting it to a vote before the members of the Plympsore Aero Club.

'All in favour, say aye.'

Chorus of ayes!

'All against, vote no.'

'No,' said Colonel Atkey loudly, and he added 'But dammitall, since it's passed, you may have my plane'

Penntifer's Plan whipsawed across England, went up and down and across, slipped across the borders of Scotland and Wales, and even nipped over into Ireland

A clerk in an office in Whitehall in London leaned over to another at a neighbouring desk and said 'I say, have you heard anything about this thing called "Penntifer's Plan"? There was a fellow on the bus this morning, talking

'Can't say I have except that you hear that there's some sort of a do on My wife was talking to her sister, who lives in Birmingham, last night She said they were quite excited in Birmingham over something that was known as Penntifer's Plan, but that was all she knew There's supposed to be a meeting over it at the Air Ministry at twelve'

At Nottingham, a group of men, some thirty, sat in the living-room of the Coach and Horses Hotel, waiting They were in type similar to the band that had met at Plympsore Some of them nursed pewter jugs of warmish beer Others sat with their hands idle Their leader, a tall, sandy-haired man with a stoop, would go anxiously to the door every so often and look out towards the hall and the reception desk and the porter's booth Then he would return and sit down and play with his watch-chain From far down the hall came the thin tinkle of the telephone bell Everyone in the room stiffened Then the porter, in his green linen jacket and striped apron, came shuffling down the hall The stoop-shouldered man was at the door waiting 'It's for you, sir,' said the porter 'Personal call for Mr Lester Cridmore A Mr Penntifer from Plympsore is calling you'

'By Jove! It's come It's Penntifer himself'

Cridmore rushed down the hall and into the telephone box next the porter's booth. His hands were trembling as he shut the door and picked up the receiver The group of men had followed him down the hall, and he could see their flushed and excited faces pressed against the glass door as he said 'Yes Yes . Hello Are you there, Mr Penntifer? This is Cridmore speaking, Midlands Aero Club'

Sir Fraser Woolmer, the Air Minister, sat with his head bowed in his hands in his enormous office in the Air Ministry He had aged twenty years in one week His cheeks had sunken shockingly and his eyes had a feverish, glassy sheen, deep in their sockets With him were three men They were Mr Aaron Waldo, the

Prime Minister, Mr Leshe Spanka-Winwold, the Foreign Minister, and Lord Haldare, First Lord of the Admiralty

They were the big men, the strong men of the Empire, but they were little frightened children contemplating the wreck of their possessions, things that had been trampled on and shattered by the ruthless foot of an adult bully. They were so close to panic that their dignity lay over them no thicker or stronger than the white skin inside an eggshell.

'There's a man named Penntifer supposed to have a plan,' said the Prime Minister. He was dark-haired, dark-eyed, translucently pale.

Sir Fraser raised his head. 'Who is he? Where is he?' He was ready to grasp at anything, even an unknown name, a name that meant nothing to him.

The Prime Minister lit a cigarette, and a close observer would have seen that his hand was shaking.

'We don't know entirely. It's got around somehow. Supposed to be a chap somewhere in Devon. What is the use? Another day and a half and our time will be up. Have you anything left that can put up a fight, Fraser?'

The Air Ministry jerked his shoulders. 'Penntifer - Penntifer' he said as though the name were hypnotising him. He was feeling the strange mysterious surge that Penntifer's Plan was sending about England even though none but a very few knew what it was. 'Penntifer. Why doesn't someone send for him - bring him up here?'

It was the Prime Minister's turn to shrug. 'He is supposed to be coming to London to lay his plan before us - according to the latest news. Probably some crank.'

The First Lord of the Admiralty said. 'For God's sake, Waldo, let me send the fleet and at least blow up as much of their coastline as we can get at from the water.'

Sir Fraser Woolmer was like a man under a spell. But then he was already entering the illness that carried him off two weeks later. He half-whispered. 'But what is Penntifer's Plan?'

The door opened quietly, but all the men looked up. It was Sir Fraser's personal secretary. He said. 'I beg your pardon. I would not have disturbed you. There are some men here who will not go away. They insist upon seeing you, Sir Fraser. A Major Charterod, India, retired. And a Mr Penntifer, stoutish chap. If it hadn't been I'd heard the name—'

'By God!' said Sir Fraser Woolmer. 'He's come!'

A man and a girl stood in a deserted street outside the White Unicorn in Wells. It was midnight. There were clouds scudding

across a half moon. It was cold. There was the faint scent of the coke that the English always burn in their small towns, pungent, vital, and nostalgic. People who have smelled it once never forget it. The name of the man was Edward Stokes. He was the mechanic of a Wells garage. He was thirty, with light hair and light-blue eyes and a small frame, but his face was thin and pinched as though when he was young he had not had enough food, physically and psychically. The name of the girl was Ellen Snivers. She worked behind the kitchenware counter of the Woolworth's in Wells. Her teeth and mouth were too small, but she had rich, thick brown hair and large, dark eyes. She was bundled in a cloth coat and wore no hat.

'Yer gom'?' she asked. They stood on such an old street that the houses above them leaned wearily against one another. They stood against the leaning houses.

'Mornin' Dawn.'

'Like as not ye'll not be comin' back?'

'Like as not.'

The girl sucked her breath in between her teeth. 'Oo's 'e?' the girl said fiercely, and swiftly, hotly jealous and frightened withal. 'Oo's 'e, that you should follow 'im? Gorn flyin' off to get killed. Oo's John Penntifer?'

The man scratched his head. He did not know who John Penntifer was. He just knew that he had been called and that he was following him. 'E's got a plan,' he said. 'All of us is going. If we don't it'll be the end of everything.' He looked up at the crooked gables of the houses outlined for a moment against the clear moon, the crooked angled gables, and the black chimneys, pots, and the houses that had leaned for so long. It seemed to him worth while to go. The girl's fingers were cold in his warm hands.

She clutched him suddenly. The half wail, half cry that was torn from her was old. The old streets and the old houses had heard it before down through the stone-bound centuries. 'Don't go! Don't go! You'll not come back. You'll be killed. Then wot shall I do? Wot shall I do? Oh, don't go.' She ended in a sobbing, with her face pressed to his coat at the neck, and her fists pounding at his breast.

'I'll come back,' said Edward Stokes, though he had no great conviction that he would. Suddenly he felt the thing that was flowing so deeply out of the girl, out of her deep, hidden springs. It caught him up, and he clutched at her and they held to each other, and in his nostrils was the bitter scent of coke smoke, and the little of perfume that she had in her hair.

He tried to say 'I got to go I got to be up at four'

She was still fierce, wild, and breathless 'No—not tonight
You can go when you got to But not now No No Come'

She had him by the hand and was pulling him slowly through the doorway of the house next the White Unicorn in Wells, where she lived in a single tiny room—slowly through the doorway and up the stairs He was joyously and wonderfully glad and excited

That morning an identical scene was enacted the length and breadth of England On the stone aprons of the large aerodromes or on tiny farmers' fields distinguished only by a pole surmounted by a wind sock, the little planes stood, biplane and monoplane, low-wing and high-wing, single-seaters and two-seaters, open and cabin planes, their motors coughing and chaffering, their props idling The men who were going to fly in them moved about them dressed in warm, bulky clothing, in flying overalls, or just in what they had, trousers and leather jackets, their helmets on their heads, the flaps turned up and away from their ears Mechanics were filling the planes with oil and petrol and testing the controls Many other men stood by, watching On some fields there were two dozen planes drawn up on the line At others but two, and sometimes only one At five o'clock the muffled pilots strapped their helmets under their chins and climbed into their cockpits There were last handshakes before they cried. 'Stand clear!' One by one they moved away into the wind, into the dark, grey morning They left the earth, circled, and vanished. But London was a lodestone All their spinning noses were pointed towards London That morning the air over England was alive with wings and humming and throbbing In some homes men and women cowered again because they thought that the terror had returned But in many, men said 'There go Penntifer's men God speed . God bless!'

They came from Nottingham and Oldham and Sheffield, from Leeds and Manchester and Liverpool, Newcastle and Gateshead, Hull and Grimsby, Bolton and Blackburn, Norwich and Peterborough, Birmingham and Coventry, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Kirkcaldy and Dundee, Perth, and Greenock and Kilmarnock, and as far north as Wick, all flying southwards, pointing for Croydon They flew north from Southampton and Folkestone and Tunbridge Wells, and east out of Winchester, Salisbury, Taunton, and Exeter They were flying eastwards over the Channel of St George, from Dublin and Carlow and Kilkenny

and Tipperary Their instructions were simple 'Take off at five Fly to London Land at Croydon If there is no more room there, land at Brooklands, or Shepherd's Bush or Upper Marley, or Heston But come without fail!' They came Out of Hampshire and Surrey, Sussex and Essex they flew, from Norfolk and Suffolk, Lincoln and Nottingham and Cheshire, from Land's End, Devon and Dorset The mountains of Wales heard the beat of their motors They poured out of York and fairly buzzed and swarmed out of Lancashire There was fog over Kent, so they hedgehopped The men of Gloucester all had a rendezvous over Gloucester Cathedral, and they flew to London at six thousand feet, in the shape of a cross It was a ragged cross because no two planes were of the same speed and power, but a cross nevertheless

The first Ambassador of the two powers called upon his colleague, the second Ambassador, not at his Embassy, but at his home in Berkeley Square They were grim men, the two, because they were living under sentence of sudden death He said when they were alone 'I am glad that you telephoned. You have information about this man Penntifer It is difficult to understand His name is suddenly on every tongue'

The second Ambassador produced a small dossier, a stiff red cardboard envelope, from which he removed a sheet of paper. He licked his lips and read 'John Penntifer Aged forty-three Lives in Plympton, South Devon, where he is by trade a butcher Holds an amateur pilot's licence and is chairman of the Plympton Aero Club, a small local flying club Is married and has five children During the war, served with the Third Devonshire Rifles Was wounded and decorated at Mons Has no connection whatsoever with the Government Has been flying only three years Holds Class B licence Inherited butcher's shop from his father, Martin Penntifer, who died in 1923 Church of England Not regular in attendance Well spoken of by villagers of Plympton Tends to his business, which is solvent Only hobby, amateur flying' Then followed a description of John Penntifer There was also a small photograph of John Penntifer The two Ambassadors put their heads together and looked long at the square, dark figure, with the fringe of hair over his brow, and the drooping moustache.

The first Ambassador said 'This is the man who has brought three thousand aeroplanes to London And there are more arriving all the time I cannot believe it.'

'He is evidently a fanatic of some sort. I have heard of such things before. The English are in a state of extremity When a

people reaches such a condition, it will sometimes blindly follow any leader'

'These planes——' began the first Ambassador

His colleague smiled and shook his head 'They have been carefully checked upon arrival There is not a single craft there that has a speed greater than a hundred and twenty miles an hour, and most of them are powered under a hundred Not one of them is armed No Englishman ever carries arms They have not so much as a pistol among them So——'

'So——' echoed the first Ambassador 'What can come of this? What have we to fear?'

'Nothing It is a forlorn and hopeless gesture They will never leave the ground They have no power, no guns, no radio Our ultimatum expires in thirty-six hours The Prime Minister is ready to yield now If not——' He made a gesture of dropping something

John Penntifer, Major Charterod, and Mr Harry Pryne sat closeted with the Prime Minister Waldo, Foreign Minister Spanka-Winwold, Lord Haldare, First Lord of the Admiralty, and Sir Fraser Woolmer, Secretary of State for Air Sir Richard Clapperby, the Home Secretary, hastily summoned, had joined the group Only Major Charterod was acutely conscious that he was sitting with the Government of England—what there was left of it—and because he was an old Army officer he was embarrassed and frightened Harry Pryne was still looking sulky and a little contemptuous So these were the bigwigs Well, they didn't impress *him* They were as frightened as anyone, and all they could do was to ask a lot of silly questions, and get up and walk around, and sit down again, and raise objections, and look at one another

Penntifer was neither impressed nor frightened, nor embarrassed He was very glad that he could talk to these men about his plan, which suddenly was no longer something leaping about and burning inside his head, but something that was happening There were more than four thousand private planes landed around London Their pilots were stolidly standing by them waiting for him, John Penntifer, to tell them what to do He had not expected this, but now that it had happened, it seemed all right, and he was prepared to do so First, however, he must convince these men that they need not give in, that there were still men in England who could and would fly and fight And then he must get them armed

John Penntifer had no quixotic idea of mass suicide of his

pilots to save England. He was for a stand-up fight on as even terms as he could get. But he was determined to have his way on both points, because they seemed to him the right ones. Everything that had been done previously was quite obviously wrong. It was time that something right was tried before it was too late. He tried to make all this clear to the five men who sat around the long, shiny table—the shrunken, sunken Woolmer, the pale, dark, ascetic-looking Waldo, Spanka-Winwold, who looked like a cartoon with his oversized head and Kipling moustache, the neat and frosty Clapperby, all clipped and smart and finely, too finely, bred, and the old diehard Haldare, who wanted to take his fleet out and fight and to whom the new ways of war and international gangsterism were inexplicable. To him John Penntifer was like a being from another planet, and his colleagues much worse even, for listening to him. A butcher from Plymouth taking up the time of the Government in the deepest crisis it had ever been called to face—shocking!

The Prime Minister said: 'These are all private machines, privately owned and flown, Mr Penntifer?'

Penntifer nodded. He wondered why they kept asking him obvious questions.

'How were you able to persuade them to fly to London?' Mr Waldo was primarily, a politician and curious about any kind of mass movement. But Penntifer did not know that, so he replied by telling him the truth.

'We telephoned them,' he said. Lord Haldare snorted in disgust, as much at the utter impossibility of the reply as the broad Devon accent of Mr Penntifer. He had no experience with the efficiency of the pyramided telephone call.

Sir Richard Clapperby asked: 'What exactly is it you want?' He was another career man who had weltered in intrigues. The arrival of four thousand men by air under a leader who was a stolid butcher from a place called Plympsmore meant only one thing to him—a *Putsch*.

Mr Aaron Waldo shook his head angrily. Sometimes his colleagues depressed him. Mr Penntifer looked puzzled. 'Want?' he echoed. 'Want? We want nothing. We came to fight. There's only us left, now that you 'uns have botched the job.'

Waldo grinned. Good for old Penntifer. Then there was a kick in him. He did have something. He enjoyed the look on the faces of the Ministers for Navy and Foreign Affairs. Spanka-Winwold was more Waldo's type. He said: 'Let us stay close to facts. There are now over four thousand private planes with private pilots around London. How many more are coming?'

Mr Penntifer drew a crumpled piece of paper from inside his bowler hat, which he had never relinquished, and consulted it, then he replied 'Six thousand and eighteen, if they all get through'

'How do you propose to fight without arms?'

'Arm us,' replied Penntifer with a direct simplicity that shocked even Lord Haldare into momentary approval

'Hm,' said Spanka-Winwold 'The time is insufficient We could not possibly adapt those planes for direct gunfire It would take a month'

'Give us a man in the back with a machine gun,' John Penntifer said This was, after all, no different from addressing the members of the Plympsore Aero Club, except that, by and large, some of these men seemed to have less common sense and understanding 'We can all fly front cockpit sor Put a man in back with a gun If you 'aven't' (Lord Haldare winced at the 'haven't') 'got enough machine guns, rifles will do Anything that shoots, sor There was a chap came into our aerodrome once Pilot Had been in the naval air service 'E brought down a 'Un with a pop from 'is service pistol It was in the early days. I mind him tellin' of it'

Lord Haldare, looking at Sir Fraser Woolmer, made a circular motion with his finger around his forehead, but Woolmer shook his head and said to Haldare 'But you can't get around the fact that the planes are here, devil take it That's been done, hasn't it?' He turned his sunken feverish eyes on Penntifer 'Granted that we could do that - what then? None of you are trained to fight in the air You have no means of communication. Some of your planes - most of them - will be outspeeded a hundred and fifty miles an hour'

Penntifer leaned forward on the edge of his chair with his bowler hat held firmly between his thick, stubby fingers His plan was so beautifully clear and simple now Not like it had first been when it was buzzing inside his head like a wasp trapped on a windowpane Everything could be answered

'Give us all the flying men you've got left to work the guns. We'll fly the planes The speed? The difference in speed? Why, sor, that's a part of the plan, sor'

At the word 'plan' the heads of all the men in the room came up sharply. They were all succumbing to the hypnosis of the sound of the phrase, something solid and reliable - 'Penntifer's Plan!'

'It is then your wish' - it was Sir Clapperby speaking, he was psychically unable to get the idea of the *Putsch* out of his head -

'your wish that we reply to the powers refusing their demands?'

Harry Pryne interposed sullenly 'It ain't our wish It's what we damn well want' Major Charterod looked shocked and started to say something, when Penntifer, waving his hat for emphasis, interposed 'We don't want to give up the Empire like that, sor We're not used to it It's not been our way When the Spanish Armada was on its way 'ere'—he consulted the paper again—'three hundred and fifty years ago, an ancestor of mine sailed from Plymouth to stop 'em Let us go up an' fight, sor We've stopped 'em before We'll do it again, sor' He had addressed his last pleas, somehow, to the Prime Minister Sir Fraser had sunk together again

Lord Haldare suddenly barked angrily 'Rot! Nonsense!' For a moment, Penntifer thought it was old Colonel Atkey speaking again 'The whole thing is absurd War cannot be conducted by civilians Send these madmen home, Waldo We're in a bad enough spot as it is This undisciplined mob will only make it worse'

'Is this your advice, Lord Haldare?'

'It is'

'What is your opinion, Spanka-Winwold—Sir Richard—Fraser?'

Clapperby snapped 'Get rid of them They'll bring a worse bombing than ever down on us'

Sir Fraser Woolmer said nothing Spanka-Winwold fingered his chin and made a mouth 'Mmmm What do you think, Aaron?'

The Prime Minister's eyes were snapping darkly, and for the first time there was a flush on his almost translucently white cheeks He was a Jew, and had a Jew's sensitivity and feeling for humanity behind history He said

'Turn them loose, I say They're England You chaps aren't You used to be, but you aren't any more You've forgotten how to fight You've bred it right out of your line I say send them up They'll rip the sky loose from its mooring before they let those murderers through. Send them up. Let them try Penntifer's Plan'

They were all on their feet, and John Penntifer was standing, too, with his rusty bowler hat between his fingers, and his low collar tight around his neck They were going to try his plan, the thing that had come out of his head, it was all coming curiously to life like the incredible throbbing flight of the amateur pilots to London For a moment, as he stared into the famous faces around him, the whole thing took on the quality of a dream, but John Penntifer knew that this time it wasn't

It was no dream when he sat at the stick of the little grey Loddwell Gull, at eleven thousand feet, forty miles due east of London, over a little town called Tilbury. Beneath him was the yellow, widening River Thames. And in the rear cockpit sat an R A F lieutenant, an observer by the name of Postgate. Postgate sat with a five-gallon tin of petrol between his knees and one of the new Bren machine guns in his hands. He was connected to John Penntifer, Pilot Penntifer, by a speaking tube. Three hundred yards to his left floated Major Charterod in the golden Alpha low-wing monoplane. The major had a gunnery sergeant in his rear cockpit, likewise equipped with a machine gun. The major was very happy. Off to the right was Harry Pryne flying old Colonel Atkey's Turnley Eaglet. They had done a nice rush job on the Eaglet - nailed boxes to the floor, loaded up the cabin with spare petrol and ammunition drums, punched a hole through the roof. She had a hump back, did the Eaglet, and so when Private Catwright of the Fusiliers climbed on to his boxes and stuck his head and shoulders through the hole in the roof, he was quite above the backwash of the propeller. Also he was glad to see that he could fire his machine gun in all directions. It was understood that once he took his position through the roof, Pryne would strap him into place.

They were all in the sky, Penntifer's band. They formed a curving curtain at eleven to twelve thousand feet that spread around south, south-east, east, and north-east of London. They draped their wings over the nest that was London. All that night they had been tuned and fitted up, and prepared, and fuelled and armed. What flying men there were left went in the rear as gunners, and, in accordance with John Penntifer's wish, the amateurs sat at the stick. It was a part of his plan. He could not say why, but the Devon butcher had felt from the first that he wanted men at the controls who would do instinctive things when the time came, men who knew their little fluttery planes.

Penntifer's Plan was in operation. At nine o'clock in the morning the time limit of the ultimatum of the two powers had expired. At five minutes past nine the Prime Minister made the brief, simple speech that thrilled the world, in which he invited the two powers to come and take what no Englishman ever surrenders. At fifteen minutes after nine the first plane whipped around, faced into the wind, roared its tiny engine, and rolled off the apron at Croydon and into the air. This was John Penntifer in his Loddwell Gull. From then on they poured into the sky as fast as they could be wheeled into line and sent off, one behind another. They rose from Croydon, from Heston, and from Hat-

field, from Gatwick and Hendon, and Brooklands and Abridge. In some places they went off one to the minute, and in some aerodromes, where there was more room, even faster. At ten o'clock there were more than thirty-five hundred in the air, climbing, climbing, climbing, reaching for their ceiling as quickly as they could pull themselves up by their labouring little props. At half past ten the last one was off the ground. Their instructions, written out laboriously by Penntifer, were broadcast to them at the aerodromes. They were to fight as long as they were able. They were particularly to adapt themselves to the *difference* in speed between themselves and the attacking fighters, by using the simplest of manœuvres such as the wing-over or stall turn, the Immelmann, which was the same thing done at speed, and the sideslip. They were to remember to begin all of these manœuvres long before they deemed it necessary in point of time. They were specifically to avoid trying to get into any battle plan or formation, but were to fight and fire whenever and wherever a suitable target presented itself. When the Army's mechanical ears on the ground gave warning that the enemy was approaching, fast R A F machines, the few remainders of the British air fleet, would take the sky, seek the level of the defenders, and fire smoke bombs of warning, the colour, black, white, green, or red, to determine the general direction from which they might be expected. And that was all.

And so John Penntifer sat at the controls in the front cockpit of the grey Loddwell Gull and tried to keep his feet from being too heavy on the rudder bars. His air-speed indicator showed that he was cruising at seventy-five miles an hour. It was a clear, bright day. Four thousand feet below, there were a few small patches of broken clouds, but not enough to offer cover. He looked over the side and saw a steamer slowly moving down Thames and out towards the Channel, which lay blue and shimmering to his right. He could see the irregular streets and red dots of houses of Gravesend and Barking. He felt nervous, but happy. He was flying. The hollowed and stained butcher blocks with the red slabs of meat and the tubs of tripe and the pinkish strings of sausages were very far away. The country below him was flat and criss-crossed by straight roads, unlike his hilly Devon. He looked out at the canvas stretched taut over the struts of his wing tips and wondered what would happen when bullets began to rip and tear. He was not wondering whether he would get back or whether he would die. He did not expect to die. He saw no reason why he should. He believed that his plan was sound and that if he was killed it would be merely a piece of bad luck. No,

he was worrying over whether he would carry out his manoeuvres successfully. He felt oddly embarrassed because Flying Officer Postgate of the R A F was in his plane. He felt that he must fly well and do honour to his beloved instructor, Lieutenant Handwie. He wondered whether Handwie was alive or dead. Probably dead. Four-fifths of the British fliers had succumbed in the two attacks. But Postgate was no doubt a connoisseur of good flying. Hence Penntifer's nervousness. It was the same way he always felt when Lieutenant Handwie turned him over to a brother officer, or a friend, or an inspector from another county, for a check flight. In his mind he rehearsed the things he had to do to complete the simple manoeuvres of which he hoped to make use. It was definitely stuck in his mind that the simpler they were, the more effective they would be. He had had the feeling all along that it would be *their* type of flying, his and the other amateurs', that would in the end prevail.

Postgate spoke into his ear through the speaking tube, and Penntifer jumped. He always did at first when talked to through the tube. He heard Postgate say 'One of our buses coming up. Just under your left wing. They do must be going to get under way. Watch him.'

Penntifer strained his eyes—it is very difficult to see a plane beneath you when you are in the air—and suddenly made out the craft with the two coloured circles painted on the upper wings. It was climbing steeply. Penntifer kept it in sight by making wide, careful circles. As it came up to their level, both Penntifer and Postgate could see that there was something painted on the side of the plane, large white numbers. They read '15,000'. Then from the plane burst little black puffs of smoke that widened out into balls and drifted backwards from her tail.

'The east,' Postgate said. 'Due east, probably. They're just plain barging over out of the east. No attempt at surprise.'

'What's the number mean?' asked Penntifer.

'Their altitude, probably. They're coming over at fifteen thousand feet. That doesn't give Archie much to shoot at. Head east.'

Penntifer dropped a wing and gentled the rudder bar with his right foot—he had been flying due north at the moment—and saw the compass swing around until the large white *E* showed on the black compass ball. He looked and saw planes all about him heading towards the east, the mouth of the Thames and the open Channel. He could see and counted thirty, and there were more converging all the time into the area of the Thames basin,

all shapes and sizes and colours, bright, gay oranges and shining reds, deep blues and light blues, green ones and white and a few in sombre black, tiny things, a tatterdemalion armada that made Penntifer draw in deeply with pride the mixture of clear, cold air and fumes. Yes, they could not lose. Three hundred and fifty years ago, the foreign Armada had threatened the little island, and Englishmen had gone forth in little ships, and they too had turned their faces towards the east, looking for the enemy to harry and harass and beat him.

Penntifer spoke through the tube to the officer 'How can we make them come down to our level? We can't climb any higher.'

'They'll come down,' said Postgate 'They must.'

As a matter of fact, as it turned out later, Penntifer's Plan was attended by extraordinary luck and circumstances that he could not know of or foresee. Bombing at twenty thousand-odd feet, or even fifteen, is a haphazard business. It is valuable only as a terrorising agency. Accuracy is entirely problematic. But this was a punitive expedition, one that was intended to do serious and lasting damage. And it was only the wiping out of the English defences that had made it possible at all. The bombers were planning to come down to five thousand feet over London and possibly lower. The two-power armada knew of the pitiful amateur air fleet that might lie between them and London. But what they didn't know was the extent to which they had been armed overnight. For Mr Spanka-Winwold had crowned a night of glorious achievement – supplying men and guns to the tiny planes was no mean task – by a neat *tour de force* that gave him great satisfaction. When the two Ambassadors called at Downing Street he arrested them immediately, gave them the opportunity of telephoning to their Embassies news of the English decision to fight, and then sent them to the Tower and had them shot without further fuss or bother, for piracy. Mr Spanka-Winwold was feeling the stirrings of things that had sent a band of English amateurs into the morning sky against hopeless odds. There was something about Penntifer's Plan that was catching. The Foreign Minister grinned to himself when the news of the execution was telephoned him. But that was the reason why the enemy did not know more about Penntifer's air fleet, except that it was to be brushed aside by the fighting planes in another general slaughter, while the bombers went on about their appointed business. The mechanical ears had picked up the invading air armada ninety miles off the English coast, at fifteen thousand feet. But by the time the first advance scouting flights caught sight of the ridicu-

lous motley crowd of coloured specks in the air, awaiting them, they were down to ten thousand feet

That was how John Penntifer first saw them from the air. They came in waves, in formation, just a thousand feet below him, all silvered and metallic, with the sun splintering on their metal skins. Some of them were stubby and kiwi-winged, some had little metal pants where their landing wheels ought to have been, and some of them had no wheels at all. The fighters were flying at ten thousand feet. Two thousand feet below them were the huge bombers with their great silver, triangular wings with the little bumps on them made by their three and four engines. Some of them flew in line and some in V's, and some in a new formation that Postgate had never seen before, a half-circle with the open end to the rear. Penntifer thought he had never seen such a glorious sight in his life.

Then, to his surprise, he found the air to the right and the left of him, and above as well as below, thick with tiny canvas, coloured planes. He saw that they extended as far as his eye could reach on either side of him. In a moment the two lines would meet and cross over one another. The time had come to do something, to fight. He wondered whether he would know how.

Then he saw a plane to the right of him suddenly stick its nose down and dive, and another and a third, and simultaneously the tiny silver planes below nosed upwards and began to hang on their props. The first of the English planes that had dived sprouted a bright orange flame at the engine and then, as it plunged, poured forth ribbons of smoke. But it fell on a giant four-motored bomber beneath it and carried it down, spinning like a lazily falling leaf, quite out of control.

Penntifer heard Postgate say 'One! I say, what luck! They've got to come up to us. Steady, old man. Let them. When they reach us, fall away and flatten out and I can give them a burst from beneath. We want them on our tails, but they don't know that. I'll tell you when to drop.'

A tiny steel machine suddenly rose at their side as though it were being hauled up with ropes. Penntifer saw a helmeted figure at a gun. 'Now,' said Postgate. Penntifer pressed the stick hard over to the left and jammed top rudder and heard the wind scream through his wires until Postgate coolly commanded 'Flatten her out.' Then above the roar of his engine he heard the first chaffering of Postgate's machine gun and then heard his muffled 'Got him, I think. It's against all the rules. Mind the fellow diving.'

In a quick glance over his shoulder Penntifer saw a bright plane

pouring on to him and immediately pulled the stick back, and when he had the nose raised, eased on the throttle and kicked right rudder in a wing-over or stall turn. For an instant his plane was a grey cross against the sky, and a target, and bullets zipped through it, but Penntifer didn't know it. He let the Gull dive into the finish of the turn and saw the little all-metal fighter whip up into a similar manoeuvre, but at the high speed of the Immelmann. When it came out, it was ahead of them and a mile and a half away. Two planes were attacking it, one from above and one from below, and then a third picked up the fight, and the three chivvied it until it blew up.

'Oh, well done!' said Postgate into Penntifer's ears. 'Well done. Fine flying.'

It made Penntifer happier than anything ever had in his life before, not excepting the day that he had passed his flight test and received his licence, or even his first solo flight. He looked about him. He wanted to do some more fine flying. The drop had brought them into the path of the second line of bombers coming over. Penntifer could see the machine gunners in the juttied-out front cockpits of the four-motored planes, and could see that they were working. The air was now full of roar and crackle, and another of his little light sports fleet caught fire and began to fall. The line of bombers came on like a gigantic steel scythe sweeping across the sky. To give Postgate a shot at them, Penntifer simply flew at right-angles across their line of flight. By rights Penntifer should have been riddled. But the gunners in shooting were calculating for their own speed and equal speed from the target. It was just that it was too simple a shot. A man highly trained in tricks and gunnery angles, and modern battle technique can sometimes be relied upon to go completely to pieces in the face of a simple problem such as knocking a sitting hare off a rock. This essentially was a great part of Penntifer's Plan. Postgate shot two of the oncoming gunners and then Penntifer, who was beginning to catch the rhythm of the battle, sideslipped under them and then flattened out in time to let Postgate get in half a dozen bursts. Two of the bombers began to throw smoke and lump. They fell off in flying speed. A dozen of Penntifer's planes fell away, dove them out of the upper sky, and finished them off, and in turn were attacked by a flight of the enemy fighters from above. The amateurs rolled and swooped and scattered with the the fighters on their tails, shooting them to ribbons. Beneath him Penntifer saw chunks fly from his planes and watched them fall, out of control. He felt himself tapped on the back of the helmet. He turned and looked. It was Postgate. He was gesticulating. He

showed Penntifer the severed piece of their speaking tube. It had been shot away. Then he pointed down at the scattering planes and made a swooping motion with his hand. Penntifer understood, closed the throttle, and dived. Others of his fleet were diving too. He saw Harry Pryne's Eaglet pass him like a plummet and drop on the tail of a beetle-bright fighter. Private Catwright ecstatically loosed a burst almost at point-blank range. The fighter rose in a desperate climb and for a moment exposed its silver belly to Postgate's fire, and Postgate blew it to pieces. It fell, tumbling cartwheel fashion, end over end.

The attacking planes began to get rattled. Instead of going on, they turned to fight, bombers as well as pursuit planes. It closed up the gap in the one weakness in Penntifer's Plan. Penntifer's planes could never catch the big two-hundred-mile-an-hour bombers. They could have crashed through, taken their losses, and flown on to their destination and unloaded most of the bombs before the defending fleet could have caught up. But flights that have been trained to fight in formation and hold the formation above all are at a disadvantage when the formations are broken, and the two-power formations were being broken by two things — preponderance of numbers and difference in speed. They were so much faster than Penntifer's planes that they were continually overshooting their mark. Before a flight could turn and manoeuvre back, two or three of the little sports planes had nipped off a straggler and crumpled him. Too, the Penntifer planes were all fighting singly without rhyme or rhythm. A flight of two-power pursuit planes would waste itself on a single defender, shoot it down, and return to find bombers trying to fight off swarms. The bomber is not a mobile fighting unit. He can defend himself up to a certain point, but when he loses his screen of pursuit planes and fighters, he begins to work into a bit of a panic. Also unorthodoxy makes him nervous. The fast, brilliant boxer is always in more danger of being hurt and beaten when he stacks up against a slow, awkward, unorthodox novice than when he meets a man of his own skill, but a trifle slower. Penntifer had filled the sky with just such slow, sticky, unpredictable, individual fighters who had no idea but to put themselves in a position to do damage, who did nothing according to the accepted rules of air fighting, and who simply nullified the speed advantage of the two-power ships by having no speed at all. It was the lesson that John Penntifer had learned the day that he had had the controls of the fast transport plane for a few minutes and had made a five-mile error with the bare pressure of a finger. A good fast man can

sometimes beat a slow man at his own game, by slowing down to his speed and then just keeping ahead of him. But the two-power planes couldn't slow down without their controls going mushy. They dived on the tails of Penntifer's planes and that's where the English wanted them, because only then could the men in the rear cockpits shoot. The two-power battle fleet outnumbered and outspeeded the English Air Force by two to one. Penntifer's amateur fleet outnumbered the attackers.

The bombers, instead of going on, wheeled and began to fight.

Edward Stokes, the mechanic of a Wells garage, was flying a Pudney Sportwing. In the rear cockpit sat Corporal Smivver. The corporal had a rifle in his hands and a couple of hundred rounds of ammunition because there had not been enough machine guns to go round. They had been over West Ham when the storm broke. Stokes looked out over the nose of his little machine through the spinning prop at the grim, knifelike silver line that was sweeping out of the east.

'Gaw,' said Edward Stokes to himself, 'I'd like to know wot I'm don' 'ere. I'm no blinkin' 'ero.'

Corporal Smivver brought a cartridge up out of the magazine of his rifle into the breach and wiped a fleck of dust off the sights. The Sportwing had a ceiling of nine thousand feet, so that Edward Stokes was below the first flight. Three enemy fighters dived at him, spitting fire. Edward Stokes did not know what to do, so he turned his ship broadside with a sickening little skid. It improved the target for the two-power single-seater fighters, but it also gave Corporal Smivvers what he very much wanted - a shot. The attacker was pouring himself right down Corporal Smivver's sights so that when he pulled the trigger he quite naturally shot the pilot through the head. The single-seater never changed its angle. It missed the Sportwing by six feet and flew on into the ground. A few seconds later Pilot Edward Stokes sighed and leaned backwards against the rear of the cockpit, his head on his chest. Corporal Smivvers already had slumped quietly to the side of his cockpit. His rifle, with one shell exploded, was twisting over and over again on its way to earth.

The little Sportwing then did a curious thing. It neither fell, nor burst into flame, nor spun. It went into a long, sweet, gentle glide for earth. Its engine had stopped because most of it had been shot away. All by itself the little craft came winging down out of the fight that was raging in the upper sky, its nose pointed towards London town, as though in its last extremity it was going home. It was heading into the wind too. It sailed over a clump

of trees, cleared a low wooden fence, and landed in a field, where it bumped and bounced twice and then diopped its tail with a thud and rolled on for some fifty yards until it came to a stop. When the people ran up to it they found the two dead men who had come home.

The first group of prisoners reached Whitehall a little after eleven o'clock. There were seven of them, the crew of a four-motored bomber that had been forced down with three engines disabled. They were ushered into the office of Mr Leslie Spanka-Winwold. With him were Sir Fraser Woolmer and Mr Aaron Waldo. The leader, a major in a light-green whipcord uniform, recognised them and saluted. Mr Spanka-Winwold inclined his head courteously. The major drew himself up and said, 'We do not understand why we have been brought here. We beg to claim the rights of prisoners of war. We are all commissioned officers.'

Mr Waldo was looking at them mockingly but said nothing. Mr Spanka-Winwold said, 'Hmmm. Yes. Unfortunately for your cases and the cases of all others who happen to fall into our hands, war has not been declared. You have been brought here to enable you to communicate with your Government for a few minutes by telephone if you wish to do so. Afterwards—' He paused and his look took in the seven men with no emotion whatsoever—'afterwards you will be taken to the Tower and hanged for piracy.'

Major Philip Charterod, D S O, Indian Army, retired, put his light, floaty Alpha monoplane into a right-hand sideslip, a thoroughly wrong manœuvre to get away from the snarling, whining dive of the seven-plane patrol that had aimed its V at him like a stickless arrow. But it was so wrong that it accomplished its purpose. It got him away on the underside of the attacking dive. He wondered why he did not hear the clatter of Captain Ledyard's machine gun. The captain had a broken leg, which was in a cast. He was the gunner assigned to the Alpha monoplane. He had shot down two pursuit planes, a single-seater and a two-seater. The bellies of the fighters all flashed silver in the sunlight as they whipped up and over in a perfect half-loop, half-roll in unison. Captain Ledyard should have been ripping the underside of those silver bellies with his gun. Major Charterod flattened out and turned around to look, and then understood better. The captain was dead.

'Blast!' said the major. 'Damn and blast!' His eyes yielded

tears that blurred his goggles for a moment. He remembered the happy grin on the young captain's face when they carried him out and loaded him into the cockpit and put the gun into his hands. He had been shot down in the first attack.

Suddenly the major no longer had any desire to live. He had the most curious longing and love for the man who had been behind him. He wanted to be where he was. A black and grey twin-motored bomber was zooming towards him. The major altered his course so as to bring him head on into the bomber's path.

'Coming, old chap,' he said, and flew himself and what was left of the man in the back into the face of the bomber, and lived long enough thereafter to know that he had taken the bomber with him before the all-engulfing crash of the tangled planes ripping into the green earth, blotted all into the never lifting darkness.

The weather dispatcher at Margate reported to the big wireless weather station at Droitwich: 'There's a devil of a fog rolled in here. It's closed right down.'

The fight blazed along a twenty-five-mile air front. The sky was free from artillery bursts because Archie had been warned to keep out of it. But it was filled with the rolling, snarling whine of the high-powered fighters, the low, steady, humming drone of the bombers, and the sharp crackling and rattling of gunfire. The fight was working down lower too, and every so often one of the little specks circling and spinning and wheeling in the heavens would plunge to earth trailing a long, feathery tail of smoke. Sometimes it would be one of the gaily coloured wood and canvas planes, but more often a silver fighter, and once a bomb on the bomb rack beneath one of the grim, huge bombers was exploded, the bomber flew into silver pieces, and five aircraft within range of the explosion crumpled their wings and fell to earth, four of them enemy planes.

The two-power planes were out of formation. They were fighting and shooting hard, and the white lines of their tracer bullets criss-crossed against the blue. But the amateurs were above and below them. It was Indian warfare in the air, guerrilla sniping, the big hunt. Sometimes one of Penntifer's men would fly deliberately as bait, fall away, and watch the too fast fighter hunted and harried from three angles. In the final analysis, the formation-drilled fighters were no match psychologically for the antics of the individual defending airmen.

At a quarter past twelve the fight was over. The enemy

machines turned their noses to the east and ran. What was left of Penntifer's fleet circled and circled and watched them run because there was no use pursuing them. They didn't have the speed. A little over six thousand private planes had taken the air. Just under four thousand remained flying. Hardly one but was pockmarked with bullet holes. They remained in the air until some of the surviving R A F machines went up and flew signs past them. 'FOG - LAND AT ONCE'

The remnants of the two-power air fleet flew into the white mist that rolled in from the sea and, for the most part, never flew out of it again. It was the strange, yellow-grey blanket of fog that for three days covered all western Europe.

'The Armada became distressed through lack of fresh water and soon encountered violent storms which added to its troubles as it attempted to sail home around Scotland and the West Coast of Ireland. Many ships were wrecked, and in Ireland their crews were massacred, many more sank in the open sea. Only half the ships that left the Tagus returned to Spain, and in those death and sickness were appalling. The complete failure of the invasion project was due to the English plan of keeping to windward and fighting at long range, which was followed throughout.' (From the STORY OF THE SPANISH ARMADA)

When the R A F bomber flying the landing sign passed him, John Penntifer turned around to see what Lieutenant Postgate had to say, but the lieutenant was unconscious, with three bullets in his body. Penntifer felt lonely. The fight was apparently over. He thought he would go home. He wondered how much petrol he had left. He knew it couldn't be much. Ahead of him he could see the rolling white bank of the approaching fog, and he turned tail and fled for Croydon. He hoped that Lieutenant Postgate was not dead. He knew that many had died that day, but of the completeness of his victory he knew nothing. He had done the thing that had been in him to do - to take up a plane and fight with it as long as there was anyone or anything to fight. He looked back again and saw that Postgate had shifted his position and that his eyes were open, and he was glad. The lieutenant had a ghost of a smile for him, and Penntifer nodded and motioned towards the ground to show that he was going to take him quickly where he could have help. Penntifer wondered why he himself was untouched. He was desperately tired, but he had not a scratch on him. Then he bethought himself of his ancestor Simon Penntyfer,

who had come roaring and rolling up the Hoe at Plymouth in the *Silver Blade* after the battle with the Armada. He was no metaphysician, this plain British butcher, but in the way he had of wondering about things, deep inside, so that no one ever suspected, he did wonder whether old Simon had been looking after him. He was thirsty, was John Penntifer, and he thought that the thing he wanted most just then was a pint of bitter.

Croydon was in sight in the distance. There were many planes around him now. Curiously, Penntifer did not look upon them as *his* fleet, but just as other planes flying back home as he was. He did not think that many of them were carrying home their dead, and that many were still to crumple and crash with haven in sight. He was thinking about his wife and his five children, who would perhaps now be safe from being blown up, shredded. He groped inside his head for a word, found it – liquidated – made into a liquid. They would not be liquid. They would be there for him, safe, whole, solid, comfortable. He, John Penntifer, their husband and father, had seen to that. He thought of sitting in the lounge of the Devon Arms, arguing with Major Charterod (it nearly killed him when they told him later of the major's gallant death), and of the joy of the Sunday flights from the Plymouth airport.

He had been right about his plan too. That pleased him. It pleased him almost as much as thinking back over Lieutenant Postgate's saying to him 'Oh, well done, fine flying.' Supposing he had just not said anything to anyone about this idea of his that the super-fast planes would be handicapped when they came up against the slow ones. Well, John Penntifer thought it just showed that a man ought to speak what was on his mind – always.

His engine suddenly went 'Pop-pop! Pop!' uttered a loud sigh, and quit. But it didn't matter. Penntifer was already over Croydon airport, at three thousand feet. It just meant being that much more careful coming in. He must make no mistakes. He had never made a real dead-stick landing before. The prospect excited him and he wondered whether he would do well.

So begin with a tight spiral after heading into the wind. Well, the wind must be due east where that fog bank was coming from. Tight spiral first, and keep the eye on the point of landing, never take the eye from it. He was listening to instructor Flight Lieutenant Handwie again. The wind was singing in his wires. He had wrapped her too tightly. He came out with a lurch and a skid that would have drawn a frown from his instructor and that made him shake his head from side to side in distress. He *always* did that. He regulated the speed of his glide and began to circle.

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He supposed they'd make a fuss when he got back. He was a modest man, but sensible withal, and after all it *had* been his plan. Medals and speeches — they might offer him a knighthood. Well, he wouldn't take it. Sir John Penntifer. Bah! Lot of good the 'Sus' and 'Your Lordships' had been to the country.

He remembered what the Prime Minister had said. 'You've bred all the fight out of your lines.' They wouldn't make him or his children like that. It didn't pay to become soft. Good chap, that Prime Minister. *He* had understood that a man could love the place where he had been born, love it so much he would rather die than give it up or have it liquidated.

He made his final turn and levelled off to land. He was gliding over the rows of low red brick houses fringing the airport and he saw the long runways stretching out before him. Those were homes below him, the dwelling-places of plain people like himself, complete with kitchen and big bed and missus and children, and his heart swelled with new joy that they were still standing intact and whole.

His heart swelled and filled for the land beneath him, rising to meet his wheels. He pulled back on the stick, touched, and rolled. Men were running out to meet him, waving, shouting, gesticulating. But he did not see them quite because for the moment his eyes were blinded by the sudden welling of tears to his eyes from the love of the soil that he had touched once more.

Oh, Them Golden Mittens

Oh, them Golden Mittens might seem an odd kind of story to offer British readers, but it is for this very reason I have included it in this book. Although it is as American as chewing gum and Coca-Cola it might very well have happened in England, say at Wandsworth or Wormwood Scrubs. And the tough boy is no longer exclusively an American problem.

The background is that of the Golden Gloves amateur boxing tournament of which I was the originator and promoter in the days when I was Sports Editor of the 'Daily News'. It is a tournament with which the British are not wholly unfamiliar since several times in the past you have sent teams to compete against the Americans in international Golden Gloves matches.

In New York the popularity of this tournament produced extraordinary production problems. An entry list of between three and four thousand boys was nothing unusual and in order to cope with the task of winnowing this field down to thirty-six, for the finals staged in the Madison Square Garden before capacity crowds, month long series of elimination bouts in all classes had to be conducted. Sets of these bouts were awarded to the various amateur boxing clubs which flourished in greater New York. Many of these elimination bouts were conducted for charity.

On the banks of the Hudson River, at Ossining, New York, stands the forbidding, grey pile of Sing Sing Prison, to the underworld known as the Big House. It is here that major criminals sentenced in the State of New York are sent for punishment, confinement and likewise execution. Here is found that horrid little chamber which houses the electric chair, into which condemned murderers are strapped and shocked to death. New

York City probably supplies the greater part of the eighteen hundred prisoners incarcerated there New York is very much aware of Ossining and Sing Sing up the river and if someone refers tactfully to the fact that 'So and so has been away, up the river' one knows what is meant

If any good can be claimed for the Golden Gloves tournaments it is that perhaps we saved some boys from making that fearful journey in that we took tough specimens, many of whom had seen the inside of reform schools, and channelled their uncontrollable truculence into more civilised outlets, of honest competition, sportsmanship and fair play We gave them a goal that they could achieve only by mastering themselves as well as their opponents, and at tournaments' end by forming the victors into a team for inter-city and international competition we gave them for the first time a sense of belonging I know for a fact that in this manner we snatched many a brand from the burning

But to return for a moment to Sing Sing Prison it was at the turn of the century, the tough, hard place where caged men were treated no better than animals In the early 'twenties the prison was fortunate to receive in Warden Laues, an enlightened man who insisted upon bettering the lot of the inmates, in conformity with modern penology as well as civilised thought One of the reforms he instituted was from time to time to invite entertainers to visit the prison and give a show for the inmates The prisoners were also allowed to form their own baseball team and occasionally play against visitors from outside the walls However, there had never been a set of boxing bouts staged within the prison walls and when I suggested to Warden Laues that I could bring up one of my Golden Gloves elimination tournaments, a set of sixteen bouts in different weight divisions, he accepted And thus one February 22nd, the national holiday celebrating Washington's birthday, we journeyed up the river with some thirty-two contestants plus doctors, trainers, handlers, referees and myself as chronicler of this innovation

The bouts were staged in the great assembly hall of the prison with the ring set up on the stage and the prisoners seated in long grey-clad silent rows This silence was to come to us all as the grisly shock of the experiment for the first five matches, thrilling and bristling encounters as I remember them, were conducted in a deathly quiet because as we later found out under the eyes of the K P s, or keepers, the convicts were afraid to cheer or shout cries of encouragement to the boxers

It was the first time we had ever heard a fight, the scuffling of agile feet on canvas, the whistling of breath and the soft thup-

thup of blows intermingled with coughs of pain as they landed Heretofore all these sounds had been covered over by the crowd noises, individual cries, running murmurs and rolling roars of cheering It was the first time too that I had ever heard the silence of fearful men caged by the law There they sat, 1,800 men convicted of crime, from robbery to murder, with their emotions pent-up within them just as their bodies were imprisoned in their cells The effect was sinister, chilling and thoroughly frightening

I remember feeling that to go through the whole programme of bouts thus would be simply unbearable and we asked the Principal Keeper whether the spirits of the men might not be released for this one afternoon I think he was impressed by the silence too, for this was a situation no one yet had come up against since the whole show was an experiment, and he too was disturbed by the horrid contrast between the torrid exchanges of blows in the ring and the silent, stony faces of the men in the audience He went down and spoke to some of the keepers and then to a few of the prisoners who were apparently leaders amongst them or trustees

When the next bout took place there were at first one or two tentative, isolated cries of encouragement They kindled others The fire spread and before the fight was a minute old the auditorium was ablaze with shouting and cheering men who for that moment had become human again

I remember too that upon that occasion one of our boxers suffered a mild concussion and our tournament doctor, for safety's sake, ordered him kept in the prison hospital overnight for observation The following morning, however, he was right as rain when the doctor picked him up with a car and brought him back to New York

These then are the ingredients This story was written in October 1940 aboard the S S 'Santa Elena' of the Grace Line en route to South America on a research assignment for a magazine Shipboard is a wonderful place to write There are no disturbances, no telephone calls, and one is bored I had left the news and sports writing behind me four years ago, but walking the decks, suddenly that day at Sing Sing came into my head, those awful sounds of fighting and silence of the grim, grey rows of prisoners, and I thought too of some of the boys we might have saved from that same fate, and thinking, OH, THEM GOLDEN MITTENS began to take shape in my head As always there was a portable typewriter in my cabin, I retired thither for four days I hope you will enjoy the result.

OH, THEM GOLDEN MITTENS

The long line of naked boys was passing in review before the doctor and the sports editor and their staffs. The *Daily Blade* was conducting the physical examination of the candidates for the Golden Gloves, the newspaper's annual amateur boxing tournament.

One by one the boys were sent twenty-five yards up the floor, clutching their papers, straight into the scrutiny of the white-haired doctor waiting for them. By the time they came to a halt in front of him, the spare, crusty man with the keen but kindly light-blue eyes knew more about them than they would have dreamed.

Another candidate began the long walk. The doctor nudged the sports editor and said: 'Here's the kid I was telling you about. He'd be a sure winner against Chicago. He's got a sweet-heart of a left. A little skinny for a welter, but he'll fill out. Look at the walk on him. He's a tough kid.'

The boy walked and held his head with truculence. He had a hard face and a trap mouth. He had blue eyes, too, but they were a peculiar off shade that made him look much older than his eighteen years. They were eyes that had the curious trick of going pale. There were times when they imparted to his flat young face a curiously deadly quality.

'All right, boy. What's your name?'

'John O'Connell.'

'John O'Connell? How much do you weigh?'

'Hundred an' forty-two.'

'You're down too fine. Better get some meat on you before the tournament starts.'

That cold, hard little knot of anger that he knew so well formed down inside John O'Connell. It was easy for the doc to talk. Get some meat on him! On what he was eating? But they said if you made the Golden Gloves team that fought against Chicago, you got to eat at a training table, with steaks every day.

'Got your letter from your father? Give me your card.'

O'Connell handed over his card and a letter in a grimy envelope. The doctor noted that his hand trembled slightly. He kept the card and studied it, handing the letter to the sports editor, who read the brief scrawl: *I give my son permission to join in the Golden Gloves. Dan O'Connell.*

The sports editor handed the letter back to the doctor, who read it and said: 'Who signed that, boy - your father?'

'Yeah'

'Oh, yeah?'

The doctor's blue eyes were boring through O'Connell. The knot of anger inside the boy was growing again and he was afraid they might find out that Sol Lefkowitz, who ran the stationery store, had written the letter for him. There had been that line on the entry blank: 'Entrants below the age of twenty-one must bring a letter from their parents permitting them to enter the tournament.'

Parents! What if you didn't have any? O'Connell had never known his mother. His pop had left him when he was six. He had got into some kind of trouble. Bad trouble. He guessed he was dead now. Old lady Slattery, who had looked after him until—until he had gone away—was always saying: 'You hang out with them hoodlums and you'll come to a bad end just like your old man.'

A bad end! His pop, and a bad end, and himself. It was all a part of it, the dreams at night, the sweating fear, and the cold knot inside that would want to grow and grow until it exploded in a blinding clouding flash of red. If they found out about that letter, maybe they wouldn't let him in the Golden Gloves. He had to get in. It was always better when he was fighting. When the knot began to grow like that, he always wanted to swing on someone. His chin came up. His eyes seemed to show more white. 'You heard me,' he said.

The doctor grinned a little and said: 'We take your word for it. I saw you dish it out a couple of weeks ago. Can you take it?'

'Yeah. I can take it.'

'Well, you're gonna get a chance to find out. This is a tough tournament. Where you been boxing before, boy? Upstate? You're not from the Metropolitan district.'

The boy said nothing. His mouth was closed in a tight line. The doctor ignored his failure to reply, studied his body and examined his teeth briefly. He said: 'I see you're unattached. A kid like you ought to be fighting for Holy Name, or Ascension Parish House. They're up around your neighbourhood. I could get you in.'

The boy was staring at the doctor now out of his pale eyes. He said in a flat voice, his thin mouth barely moving: 'I don't want no part of them. I wanna fight. You gonna throw me out or ya gonna let me fight? I ain't afraid of fightin' nobody.'

'Oh, a tough guy, eh?' said the doctor cheerfully. 'Save that for the ring, boy. Read the letters on that card over there. . . You've

got good eyes' He paused and then snapped suddenly 'You ever been away, boy?'

The knot inside O'Connell wasn't cold any more It was beginning to burn Burn and swell What did the doc have to pry for? Everybody was always prying Did he know about the stretch in the reform school, and that his name wasn't John O'Connell, but Jimmy Conners? Couldn't he ever get a break? The blazing, ballooning thing grew inside him If he swung on the doc now, they'd put him away again He hated the tall man with the white hair and the searching blue eyes the way he hated everything and everyone, only worse So bad that he wasn't going to be able to hold it

O'Connell's face was paper-white His fists were clenched He said, without opening his teeth 'What's it to you?'

Searching blue eyes met pale and deadly ones The old man was looking through him, coolly, appraisingly, probing every corner of him, weighing, judging O'Connell lowered his head slowly He was trembling

The doctor said in a matter-of-fact voice 'Nothing We don't care who you are or where you've been as long as you're a registered amateur, obey the rules, fight clean, and behave yourself Get it? Take this card over to that doctor over there and he'll examine you Good luck, boy'

The older doctor turned to the sports editor and said 'He's a killer He'll kill somebody yet He's been away to reform school. Probably fought around the bootleg amateur circuit upstate when he came out He got somebody to write that letter for him He's tough, isn't he? And scared to death of something or other too Somebody ought to get hold of that kid and straighten him out He's just in the spot now like a lot of them They can go one way or the other If somebody gets hold of them and gives them a hand, they turn out all right They're just as apt to end in the electric chair Next boy!'

The familiar letter in the envelope of the *Daily Blade* was waiting for John O'Connell when he stopped in at Lefkowitz's store to get his mail He had already fought and won two bouts in the long round of Golden Gloves preliminaries that led through the grimy, stuffy, outlying social centres and amateur boxing clubs to the glamour of the finals in Madison Square Garden He had knocked his men out in a round each, and the *Blade* had already devoted a paragraph to him as a puncher to be watched in the tournament He carried the cutting around with him. That's what you got out of the Golden Gloves -

publicity, and maybe one of the big professional managers would look you over and give you a chance

O'Connell did not much care when and where he was going to fight next. It was all the same. He would see his opponent across the ring, and the knot of anger and hate would harden. It would grow and begin to burn. The bell would ring. Just before it exploded, the thing rose into his throat, filling it and threatening to choke him. Then there would be the blinding flash of red and the roaring in his ears. Sometimes he would still be punching the air after his opponent had fallen, and the referee would have to drag him away.

He opened the envelope, took out the slip and read it.

*John O'Connell, 2987½ Second Avenue, 147-pound Open Class,
New York Division, Third Round, Sing Sing Prison, Ossining,
Feb 22, 2 00 p m. Bus will leave from in front of BLADE Office
at 10 00 a m*

O'Connell could see only three words. 'Sing Sing Prison.' Sing Sing! He grabbed a copy of the *Blade* from Sol's counter and turned to the sports pages. It was true. There was a story there. It told how on Washington's Birthday, by arrangement with the Mutual Welfare League, the *Blade* was sending a card of Golden Gloves elimination bouts up to Ossining for the entertainment of the inmates. It would be the first time that amateur bouts had ever been staged there. O'Connell read his own name in the list of contestants.

The great grey prison that filled his waking and sleeping hours with sweating fear! Were they nuts? Did they think he was going up there to fight? Did they think they were going to get him inside those stone and steel corridors where they said the lights dimmed and the men yelled and howled like wild animals when they fried somebody? O'Connell dropped the paper on the floor and stepped on it as he went out the door blindly. He'd go and tell 'em. They could put him into some other elimination.

The Big House! He had been afraid of it ever since he could remember. It had been drawing him, tugging at him, pulling him, closing in upon him.

He was bad. His pop had been bad too. He didn't remember his pop as being bad. He recalled a big man who, once when he had been sick, had come to his bed in the night and placed his hand on his head and stayed there with him. The hand had been cool and strong and felt good. If he had had his pop he might not be so afraid. He would have been able to trust his pop. He did not trust anyone else. Everyone was against him. When the knot

formed and the rage began to grow, he did not know what he would do. In the end he would kill someone and they would take him away to the Big House.

Like the time when he had been caught pilfering with the corner gang and had slugged a cop and they had sent him away to the reformatory. There he had learned a number of things that it is not good for a young boy to know. The Big House would be like that, only a hundred times worse. And in the end, he knew, the Big House would get him. It held him in horrible fascination. Sometimes he would lie awake at nights and plan escapes.

He had always been a tough little street scrapper. In the reformatory he had learned to box. When he came out, he fought in the bootleg amateur bouts upstate where you got ten dollars a fight and were tossed in with a guy twenty pounds heavier. Sometimes he made a little money, sometimes he starved. Once or twice when he was very hungry he stole and got away with it. He didn't want to be bad. But he knew that he was, that it was in his blood.

When he entered the Golden Gloves office of the *Daily Blade*, it was still early in the morning, and there was nobody there but the old doctor sitting with his feet up on a desk, smoking a pipe.

He said: 'Aren't you O'Connell? Is there anything I can do for you?'

'Yeah. Get a hold of that guy that runs the tournament. I ain't gom' up the river to fight. Let him put me in some other elimination.'

'No? Why? What's the matter?'

'Nuthin's the matter. I didn't sign up to fight in the prison. I ain't gom'.'

'Don't you want to win the Golden Gloves?'

'Yeah, I'll win it all right.'

'Not if you don't show up for that bus. The tournament's drawn. We can't put you in any other division. What's wrong about going up to Sing Sing? What's the matter? You got somebody up there?'

'No. I ain't got anybody up there. An' I ain't going either.'

'Don't you want to do something for those guys up there? They're your own people. What are you afraid of?'

The cold knot of rage was beginning to form again. Why did this old fool always have to ask him if he was afraid?

'I ain't afraid of nuthin'.'

The doctor took his pipe out of his mouth and looked at him steadily. 'Oh, yes, you are,' he said quietly. 'Why don't you admit it? Come on, what's on your mind?'

For one split moment John O'Connell was on the point of telling him. But that would have been going soft. He had been on the verge of being a panty-waist.

He was silent for a moment and then said sullenly 'If I don't go, does that mean I'm out?'

'Yeah, you're out. You know the rules.'

O'Connell called the doctor a name. The doctor sat looking at him quietly, tamping his pipe with a long forefinger. He said 'Why don't you get wise to yourself, O'Connell? You can't get anywhere being tough. That don't get you anything. We want to help you if we can. We always look after our boys.'

'I don't want no help from anybody.'

He turned and started to go, but a rustling of papers in the doctor's hand made him pause for a moment to see what he was going to do or say. The old man seemed to be looking through some printed lists. When he found what he was searching for, he looked up and said, 'Tony Agostino, the Metropolitan champ, is in your class. He'll be going up. He's a tough little boy with a mean right-hand punch. You might draw him. Maybe you're not so dumb. I think you can lick him, but maybe you don't.'

John O'Connell banged the door of the office so hard that the wire baskets on the desks jumped and rattled. The doctor smiled to himself, relit his pipe.

The ring was pitched on the chapel stage of the prison. With all the sliding doors rolled back, the room became a large, fan-shaped auditorium in which were eighteen hundred prisoners in grey trousers and grey shirts open at the neck. They sat in long rows, on benches. The lights over the ring made the faces of those sitting nearest even whiter than they were, and reflected from their eyeballs. Heavy, stalwart keepers, bulging in blue uniforms, stood on both sides. The P.K., the principal keeper, menacing, watched from the platform.

The bell at the side of the ring began to sound insistently, and the enclosure was cleared. A pair of boxers and their handlers took their opposite corners. The referee crawled through the ropes. The Mutual Welfare man, a stocky, muscular chap in grey trousers and white shirt, stepped to the front of the stage and announced, reading from a slip:

'Opening bout, hundred-and-forty-seven-pound open class, third-round elimination, winner to go to the quarter finals. In this corner, Tony Agostino, Our Lady of Refuge A.A. His opponent, in this corner, John O'Connell, unattached.'

The two boys rose to their feet and held their arms above their

heads to acknowledge the introduction and the expected patter of applause. But there was no applause, no hum, nor rustle, nor any single sound.

Johnny O'Connell was frightened again.

He had come, he did not know why. Something had pulled him, something that he had not been able to resist. He thought at first it might have been the taunt of the doctor that he was afraid of Agostino. He told himself that that was why he had come, but he knew that it was not so.

The voice of the referee called him to the centre of the ring. In the silence of the vast, crowded hall it sounded unnaturally loud. O'Connell did not listen to the instructions. He was looking out into the faces and eyeballs of the convicts.

They sat as though they were painted there. They seemed to be staring at him as though they were wondering why he was not sitting down there with them.

He was rubbing his feet in the rosin. When the bell rang he came up off his stool to face his opponent, but not with his usual blazing rush. The burning knot that swelled to help him blast his man to the canvas was not there. For the first time.

That made him uneasy. He was afraid, not of his opponent, but of something that seemed to be in the heavy, sullen atmosphere.

Agostino circled, his shoes scuffing around the ring, his left extended. He was short, tawny, powerful, with wavy black hair, square chin, and exceptionally shiny black eyes that glistened like jet buttons under the ring lights.

O'Connell followed him to mid-ring, dropped his left in a feint for the body, shifted, and smashed an overhand right squarely on the side of the Italian's jaw. It landed with a soft 'plock' and sent Agostino staggering across the ring into the ropes.

It was a sneak punch, perfectly executed, and the boy was out, glassy-eyed. Only the rope under the back of his neck kept him from falling.

There should have been a roaring shout from out front, the rising cry of excited men urging a winning fighter on to the kill.

Not a sound came from the grey men on the long benches, not a sigh, not a murmur.

It checked O'Connell's following rush and stopped him in his tracks. It halted the referee, too, who had come forward to stop the bout if Agostino should prove helpless. They stared. The great hall and the hundreds of men therein were welded into a dome of silence. The stricken boy on the ropes began to recover.

He came back across the ring, lashed out at O'Connell, hit him

on the nose and hurt him They clinched, broke, struck again, and suddenly slugged toe-to-toe in a furious flurry

Now surely they would yell and shout and cheer The fighter who comes back from oblivion and the brink of defeat, crashing blow for blow, has never failed to stir the heart of man

Terror began to mount in John O'Connell What was the matter with them? Why weren't they yelling? He was used to fighting against the crashing waves of shouting that curled and billowed up around him and swept him onward

O'Connell was being hurt by Agostino, who was tough, pugnacious, and an experienced boxer, but he didn't care He wanted to look out into those hard, stony faces to see what was the matter with them Fear he had seemed to have known for most of his life, but nothing so horrible or choking as this fighting in utter silence

Wrestling to the ropes in a clinch, he saw the men over Agostino's shoulder, looked into their staring eyeballs, and felt the grey, heavy presence of them, row upon row They seemed to him now to be crouching and lurking like some great silent, dangerous beast that follows its prey with its eyes He was back amid his old terrifying dreams, stone walls, dark passages, things that lurked, blood and a bad end The only reality was the blows that stung and hurt The bell rang He fell on to his stool He was shaking His second, one of the Holy Name handlers who was looking after him, poured advice into his ear He didn't hear him He did hear the sports editor say to the Mutual Welfare man 'Why don't they cheer or yell or do something? I can't stand it Can't you tell 'em that it's all right to yell? Those kids can't go on fighting in that silence They'll go nuts Or I will'

The doctor, who was at the ringside, said 'They're afraid'

'Yes,' said the Mutual Welfare man, 'they're afraid of the keepers The P K's got his eye on them I'll see what I can do'

The bell called again, John O'Connell got up, his feet dragging There was no more fight in him He fell into a clinch and held on. So that was it He knew now what his nameless dread had been when he had come out at the start of the bout It was his own fears and imaginings realised, the smell and the feel and the silence of the place where men had all humanity ironed out of them, where they sat stir-sodden and hopeless

That was what it would be like He remembered something the doctor had said 'They're your own people.' They were calling him, claiming him.

He was boxing listlessly and carelessly A brown glove flashed before his eyes And this blow he did not hear But he felt the

black, stunning jar as the back of his head crashed against the canvas

Then he was floating, drifting, spinning in a dark silence. He knew that he could get up if he wanted to, but he meant to stay down. What was the use of getting up, of going on, of winning, of becoming Golden Gloves champion? In the end it would be the same. Eventually he would be sitting down there among them.

'Git up, Jimmy! Git up!'

The one high-pitched strident voice from somewhere in the grey mass rang like a trumpet call over the battlefield of the dead. 'Git up!'

There was a laugh, and then a windy, rustling, running murmur of sound, a low humming through grey ranks.

It was surprise and something more than surprise that brought Johnny O'Connell to his feet. The Italian was on top of him, rushing and punching. O'Connell lashed back with both hands and stopped him.

'At-a-boy, kid! Use yo' lef'.' Isolated cries drifted upwards. 'Inna body. Inna body. Stay away from him.'

O'Connell moved forward, whipping short hooks for Agostino's head. Two landed and the Italian went down, but was up immediately, fighting for his life. Like the beat of the sea, the roar of the men below rose and broke all about them as they battled back and forth around the ring. The men were standing on the benches now, shouting advice. The grim keepers on the sides were yelling, too, and the handlers. The doctor was pounding the sports editor on the back, shouting, 'That's more like it! What a fight! The kid's got guts, hasn't he?'

They fought like two wildcats, punch for punch, and the sweet, burning rage was back inside John O'Connell again. He felt no punches, only that blazing, choking truculence in his throat that fired his arms into bludgeoning pistons. And then quite unexpectedly he was punching the empty air, and the referee was tugging at him. The hall was rocking to the old, well-remembered tumult of sound, and then the bell was clanging, clanging.

He saw them lift up the Italian boy and carry him to his corner, felt the arms of the Holy Name handler around his shoulders, hugging him, and the doc was pounding him on the back.

Suddenly he felt very sick. When they sat him on his stool, he fell quietly forward on his face into a throbbing, sickish darkness.

Johnny O'Connell lay with icebags at his head in the prison infirmary, too ill to know or care where he was. His head seemed

to be splitting with pain, and sometimes he would slip across the line into dizzy shadows

He did not know of two conversations that had taken place. In the first the doctor spoke to his colleague in charge of the prison hospital. He said 'I don't think the boy is badly hurt, though he did hit his head an awful crack on the floor. I think he'll be all right in a couple of hours. But I don't like to take a chance. I'd rather leave him here with you tonight for observation. I'll call you in the morning and see how he is.'

The other took place when an elderly convict whose number was 2X475 asked to see the warden. He was a large man with short, curly grey hair and pale blue eyes. He said 'Warden, I want to ask a favour of you. That kid that was hurt today is pretty sick, I guess. He's a good kid. He come up off the floor. Would you let me sit up with him tonight and kinda look after him? I used to box when I was a kid.'

The warden said not unkindly 'You know it's against the rules to be out of your cell all night.'

'Yeah. I guess that's so. O.K. I just asked.' He turned to go.

The warden called 'Wait a minute, Dan. Was it you who yelled this afternoon?'

'Yeah. It was me. I'm sorry, warden. I knew the kid could git up.'

'I'm glad you did,' the warden said quietly. He was studying the man, his face and his light eyes. He said 'I've changed my mind. You can keep an eye on the boy if you want to. You're a hospital orderly for the night. I'll speak to the P.K.'

It was past one in the morning. John O'Connell half awakened to the dimly lighted prison hospital as a grey-shirted orderly changed the icebag. He was dimly conscious of the bulk of a grey man who sat at his bedside and another in a heavy blue uniform and badged cap who stood at the foot.

He came up on to his elbows with a cry 'What is it? The Big House? Am I in the Big House?'

The keeper in the blue uniform stepped nearer the bed and said 'Take it easy now, kid.'

All of the old fears in John O'Connell swept him into panic. 'Lemme out! Lemme out! I ain't done nuthin'! I ain't killed anybody!'

The hospital orderly and the other at the bedside were holding him down. The boy was half delirious. 'I tell ya I ain't done nuthin' Pop! Pop! Make 'em lemme out. They're gonna burn me! Pop! Pop! I swear I ain't done nuthin''

No 2X475 stared at the keeper in blue and jerked his head. The keeper hesitated a moment and then wandered away. Then No 2X475 gently placed his hand on the boy's head and forced him back. He let his broad, hard hand remain. 'Take it easy, son. Take it easy, now. You'll be outa here in the morning.'

The hand felt cool and strong just as it had those years ago when he had been sick and his pop had stayed with him.

'Pop! Pop! Is that you?'

'Yes, son, it's me. Take it easy, now.'

'Pop! I'm scared. Stay with me, Pop!'

'I'm here, son. I'll stay with you.'

'I ain't done nuthin', Pop!'

'Sure you ain't done nothing. You came up here to box with the Golden Gloves. You got hurt. You'll be O.K. in the morning.'

'Don't take your hand away, Pop. It feels good.'

After a little, John O'Connell fell asleep again.

When he awoke later the pain had left his head. He was feeling good. He wasn't afraid any more. The other orderly had gone. Only the big man was still sitting at his side. His hands were folded and his head was down on them. O'Connell watched him for a little. Then he stirred, and the man looked up and smiled and said, 'Better now?'

'Yeah,' said O'Connell, 'I'm better. I done a lotta hollerin,' didn't I?'

'Yeah, you hollered.'

'I guess I'm yellow.'

'No, you ain't yellow. You come up off the floor and win.'

'I hollered for my pop, didn't I?'

'Yeah, you hollered for your pop.'

Something such as he had never known before was in the throat of John O'Connell, a different kind of choking. He said, 'You - you made out like you was my pop, didn't you?'

'Yeah,' No 2X475 said, 'I made out like I was your pop.'

'It made me feel good for a minute. My - my pop's dead, I guess. They told me he died when I was a kid.'

'Yeah? When you was a kid?'

There was silence between them for a moment. Then O'Connell said, 'Say, was that you yelled when I was onna floor?'

'Yeah, that was me.'

'Why?'

'I dunno. I knew you could beat that Italian.'

'I was scared. Nobody yellin' or anything. I wasn't gonna git up. I heard somebody yellin' an' wasn't scared any more.'

'You been hollering like you was scared. What you scared of?'

He could tell this man, who had been kind to him. One could take kindness from one's own people. They weren't trying to get something out of you. This grey man was the first one he could talk to and tell about it.

'I'm scared of the Big House. I always been. I went off my nut when I woke up and saw the screw and the bars on the windows. I thought I done somethin' an' they had me in stir an' was gonna burn me. I'm scared they're gonna get me.'

'What for, Johnny? You ain't done nothing. You said so.'

'I got somethin' inside of me. It's bad. When it starts up I dunno what's gonna happen. It's a sort of a knot, like, an' then it starts to burn. I git sore. It keeps on growin' until it busts, redlike I dunno what I done, when it's over.'

No. 2X475 nodded his head slowly. 'Yeah. I know. I had it like that too. It goes away. I ain't got it any more.'

'Honest? When does it go away?'

'When you get older. When you find out some guys are on the square not because they have to be but because they want to. Then it ain't so bad any more.'

'Guys like you?'

No. 2X475 looked down at the white face of the boy on the bed, the young face in which there was no hardness now. 'I guess I ain't no one to preach,' he said. 'But you find out a lotta things you wished you'd of knowed when you was a kid. You find out there's nothin' to be scared of.'

He paused. The ward was silent except for the quiet footfall of the orderlies and the breathing of sleeping men. They had been talking in whispers. No. 2X475 said. 'You're Irish, Johnny. You in the Church?'

'Aa-a-a-h,' said O'Connell, 'Christers, and their talk. What's God ever done for me? Or any of these guys in here?'

No. 2X475 nodded quietly. 'Yeah,' he said, 'I know. You get to thinkin' like that a lotta times.' He went on, looking straight in front of him as though he were talking to himself. 'I got a friend here, Father O'Malley. He never talks to me about God. God is something he believes in, but he don't say I got to. He's give me a lotta help. He got me a good job. He don't ask nothing from me. All he cares about is to help you get a break so maybe you can be something and turn out to be a square guy. Maybe if you turn out that way, that's what helps him to believe more in God.'

There was a long silence. Then. 'You got a great left, Johnny. You could be a champion.'

'Ya think I could?'

'Uh-huh! You got what it takes You got guts You got up off the floor That stuff that comes up inside of you, that makes you want to bust, that thing you're afraid of - you could make that work for you'

'Yeah?' said O'Connell 'Do ya think I could?'

'You could save it up until you got into the ring Then it would be workin' for you It would be right there It'd bring you up off the floor, when you needed bad to get up It would be there when you was tired and felt like you couldn't lift a arm and you needed to go three more tough rounds And when you'd got it workin' for you, you'd never be afraid of it again After a while you'd get so that you wouldn't want to have the feeling except when you could use it You'd feel like you wouldn't want to waste it, because some time maybe if you needed it bad, it mightn't be there if you'd wasted it And when the time would come when you didn't need it anymore, you might find it would be gone - for good It's a tough road You'd need a lot of help an' advice When you find guys that want to help you that don't get nothing out of it, those are the guys to stick to'

'Would - would you help me?'

'Me?' No 2X475 worked his fingers so that his knuckles cracked Grey was beginning to seep in through the windows Grey, the colour of the Big House 'There's nothin' I can do for you'

'Would ya lemme come to see ya? You know, if I was around here I mean, stop in'

No 2X475 looked up into the high windows, and his eyes were very light in his grey face He said 'Who, me? What would you want to come and see me for? I can't do you no good. This ain't no place for you to be coming to Ain't you had enough of this place?'

O'Connell swallowed He had to get the thing out of his throat Finally he spoke softly 'I ain't afraid of this place no more You done that for me Nobody ever done no more I'm gonna be a champeen like you said Maybe if I was around here, I'd just wanna stop by an' let ya know how I was don', see?'

Somewhere within the prison a bell rang Feet began to shuffle on stone floors No 2X475's face was greyer than his shirt, greyer than the light of the dark morning peering in through the windows. He said casually 'Yeah. I guess if you was around here, or passin' by some time, you could drop in and tell me how you was makin' out.'

He got up and dropped his hand carelessly for a moment on O'Connell's arm 'So long, Johnny,' he said, 'and good luck,' and walked away.

John O'Connell turned his face quickly to the wall in case the orderly or anyone should come by and see him the way he was

O'Connell stood outside the great iron-barred gate and drew the February air into his lungs. A coupé drove up. In it was the Golden Gloves doctor.

He said 'Hullo! You're O.K. That's good. I was just passing by.'

'Oh, yeah? Your office is down in New York, ain't it?'

'Well, what of it?'

'You come up here to git me, didn't you?'

'What difference does it make? I'm here. Get in. I'm glad you're all right. That was a sucker punch you ran into. Everybody saw it coming but you.'

John O'Connell got into the car, his head turned away for the second time that day. The doctor was careful to look straight ahead and tend to his driving.

On the road down, O'Connell said 'Doc, you're a regular guy.'

'What's regular about me?'

The boy ignored the question and sat silent for another long stretch. Then 'Doc, can you keep your mouth shut?'

'Telling a doctor is the same as telling a priest. Don't you know that?'

'Doc, I gotta tell someone. Doc, my pop's in the Big House. He's a lifer. But he's O.K. He come an' took care of me. He don't know I know who he was. His name is Dan Connors. It was him that yelled. He yelled "Git up, Jimmy." that's me. I'm Jimmy Connors. I'm just fightin' under the name of O'Connell. I been away too, doc, when I was a kid.'

The bright blue eyes of the doctor were looking straight ahead to the road.

'He didn't let on he was my pop. I guess if he'd wanted me to know he'd 'a' said something. I'll never let on. But I hadda tell someone. He said I could be a champeen. I'm gonna go back an' see him once in a while. Maybe when I'm champ I'll go back an' box an exhibition there. But I'd never let on. I knew he was my pop until he said something. I'd croak first. It's funny, ain't it, that I ain't afraid of the Big House any more, since last night?'

Thief is an Ugly Word

This is a propaganda story purely and simply, but I think if I didn't tell you so and let you in on some of its history you would never know it, at least I hope you would not. Its aim is that of all stories I write, to entertain and divert, but this one carries a small load as well under the guise of an adventure thriller. It joins up something a war agency wished to make public during the course of war, the little known fact of Nazi art looting and the efforts being made to counteract this thieving.

During the war there was created at the behest of Washington, the most astonishing propaganda agency which met and sat in New York, called the Writers' War Board. Its chairman was Mr Rex Stout the mystery writer, and its committee embraced some fifteen or twenty American writers of every stamp. I was a member of this board, its purpose and function was simple and easy to understand. When the psychological warfare boffins in Washington needed a writing job of any kind, the problem was dumped into the lap of the War Board in New York which found the right author in the shortest possible time and got the job done. This would be in the guise of short stories, novelettes, magazine and newspaper articles or even circulars and pamphlets. It worked.

I remember that one time the problem handed us was the fact that there were not sufficient young men opting for the job of bombardier in the airforce. They all wanted to be pilots. The shortage of bombardiers was making itself felt in the airforce.

Ways and means of propagandising to make the bombardier's job romantic and attractive were discussed and I was assigned to write a short story in the 'Saturday Evening Post' about an heroic bombardier. This I did, the story was duly sold and published and to my astonishment shortly after its appearance the airforce reported a satisfactory rise in the candidates for the bombardier's job.

One afternoon at a meeting of the Board we were addressed by Mr Francis Taylor, the head of New York's Museum of Art

and Chairman of the American Commission for the Salvage and Protection of Art and Historical Monuments in Europe This somewhat over-titled Commission was engaged in tracking down and cataloguing paintings, sculptures and other art objects looted by the thieving Nazis in their march through Europe so that when the war should be over old masters and other famous paintings might be returned to their original owners, either museums or private individuals Actually much of this stuff did turn up in Hermann Goering's caves and other hidden hoards uncovered by the advancing Americans Mr Taylor was asking for our assistance in making the public aware of the existence of such a project so that people might co-operate

Co-operate how? By reporting any instances of unusual activity in the art market or the under-cover offer of the sale of a well-known canvas

For among other things revealed by Mr Taylor was the fact that the Nazis were using their Argentine Fascist friends, in Buenos Aires for instance, in order to circulate and market a number of the art objects the Germans had stolen from France, Holland, Belgium and other conquered countries in order to acquire foreign exchange and ready cash Everyone knew this was going on but there was nothing much that could be done about it Since it was unofficial, diplomatic representations were unavailing Would we try somehow to expose the plot by publication and at least let the enemy know we were on to what was happening?

Simultaneously while Mr Taylor was still speaking the plot of THIEF IS AN UGLY WORD was taking shape in my mind Early in the war 'Cosmopolitan' magazine had sent me to South America to do research for a series of short stories set in the capitals of the various countries there As a result of this I had created a new fiction character and hero, an American refrigeration engineer, Augustus A Swinney whose qualities included the mathematician's ability to face the fact that two and two made four, coupled with a sense of justice and blunt daring I had, therefore, the character ready-made and likewise the background at my finger-tips. When the meeting turned to the matter of practical help for Mr Taylor's project I volunteered to write a fiction story which would contain some of the elements of the work of the Commission and its problems as well as exposing the Buenos Aires racket

The next morning I called on Miss Whiting, editor of 'Cosmopolitan,' and gave her a brief outline of the story and its purpose as far as I had developed it, and came away with an order The

order, I might add, was based on the entertainment value of the story and not its underlying theme or propaganda value. And I must confess, entertainment was my own prior consideration, for while I was listening to Mr Taylor at the meeting, it was the elements of romantic adventure contained in the dry facts that appealed to me primarily.

Propaganda in fiction is useful only when the characters and the story are thoroughly beguiling, interesting, or exciting and entertaining. It all goes back to the dictum of the great 'Saturday Evening Post' editor, George Horace Lorimer, who said 'Tell me a good story and I don't care what your background is'. This has frequently been called 'sugar-coating the pill' but I think that that is not only a false phrase but a false notion, because if you start out with the so-called 'pill' in a story and try to make it palatable, the result in nine cases out of ten is a mess, and the story doesn't come off. The pill never goes down. On the other hand, if the telling of an exciting story is the first consideration, the yarn can be materially strengthened by interpolation of facts or merely the beliefs of the writer, if these beliefs are sincere.

If this strikes you as a devious way to go about an exposé and if you might be inclined to say that a factual and documented article exposing the traffic in South America might have been more effective, you would be wrong. It is a fact, startling perhaps in its implications, that fiction has a far greater propaganda value and gains far more credence amongst readers than actuality. I need refer you only to *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* and the results it achieved. A truth becomes far more vivid and active and lives in people's minds to a much greater extent when fictionalised than when presented merely as fact. People like to be told a story.

While all the characters in this one, including Mr Swinney, are completely fictitious, they are based upon my observations during my South American trip. The wicked ones all represented something I thoroughly hated, Nazism or Fascism in one form or another, the representatives of which constituted our legal enemies in World War II, with the odd exceptions of Fascist Spain and Fascist Argentina, and I know that I secured a kind of personal release out of frying them in this story, really a sense of physical satisfaction that comes with using words as bullets.

I enjoyed writing this story and in particular the delineation of the nasty little art expert and critic called Chester Allen Buskirk, one of those bootlicking camp followers of the arts I had encountered in many places of the world. They were just too far above things. Art was international and knew no bound-

aries In this manner some of them managed to give considerable aid and comfort to the enemy who was waging total war But as I remember the most fun of all was writing the resounding, and of course utterly false, speech that Mr Swinney makes to the Countess Amalie the beautiful spy when he dismisses her Amalie is, of course, an exaggeration, yet I did see her prototype operating all over South America, Europeans like her without visible means of support, living in Rio, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, handsome feline creatures with Paris clothes and plenty of money to spend on entertainment They were supposed to be rich refugees from the war-torn Continent, but everybody seemed to know they were reporting regularly to the yellow-haired Nazi goons one likewise saw operating all over Latin America It was a business And what Swinney said to her came from my heart, even though his last line, about the kind of world we hoped to make out of this war, has a hollow ring today I guess at the time I wrote it I was actually naive enough to believe that perhaps this time it would be different

THIEF IS AN UGLY WORD

If one were to take a pencil and upon a stereographic projection of a world map execute a series of straight lines connecting New York, Munich, and Buenos Aires, one would find oneself looking at a large isosceles triangle, the points of which are at such a distance from one another that they might seem to preclude the coincidences of a certain day early in January of 1944 However, since this is not a mathematical treatise, beyond the simple arithmetic of Mr Augustus A Swinney, an American refrigeration engineer whose life's philosophy could be summed up in the inescapable verity that two and two add up to four, we are less concerned with a geometric shape than the shape and pattern of the events that took place at those widely separated points

For instance, take the functioning of two gentlemen of similar general titles, one in Munich and the other in New York, Herr Professor Hildebrand Bressar and Mr Curtis Henry Mr Curtis Henry was active on the American Commission for Salvage and Protection of Art and Historic Monuments in Europe. His opposite number, Professor Bressar, operated under the beautiful title of *Kunstverwaltungsrat für arisch-europäische Altertums-*

kultur, which, literally translated, means 'Art-Custodian-Adviser for Aryan-European Ancient Culture'

Boiling their work down to the very essence of its nature, Curtis Henry might be termed an art detective engaged in ferretting out the hundreds of thousands of objects of art pilfered throughout Europe by the Germans, with the eventual objective of returning them to their original owners. Professor Bressar, for all of his wing-collar dignity and high position as curator of the Pinakothek in Munich, was nothing more than a kind of super-fence, engaged in the disposal of same. Being merely a good, Third-Reich German, and lacking, like most such good Germans, the moral and ethical probity of a cherrystone clam, it would have been difficult to make the professor understand that what he was doing was wrong.

But we are interested in Herr Bressar only because of his ill-concealed satisfaction at the dawning of that certain day in January, illuminated as any particular day of international villainy always is to a German by being thought of as '*Der Tag*'.

In fact, that is what Herr Professor Bressar's assistant called it when he greeted him with 'Good morning, Herr Kunstverwaltungsrat. This is the day, is it not?'

'*Jawohl*, Herr Reinecke, today I have had a cable from Buenos Aires.'

'Ah. Then it — they arrive. Everything goes well.'

Professor Bressar consulted a cablegram on his desk and then shifted his gaze to certain lists of items before he smiled and replied. 'There is nothing that can go wrong. A member of the Argentine Government is the sponsor. The Americans remain stupid and asleep and besides they dare not interfere in Argentina. And human greed remains what it has always been. Think what it means, Reinecke — millions of dollar-credits for the *Partei*,' and he rubbed his hands. Herr Reinecke licked his lips.

Mr Curtis Henry's brief connection with this story is that some three thousand miles away in his office at the Metropolitan Museum of Art he was taking the deposition and claim of a Dutch refugee, a chubby, shabby-looking little man, with the face of a care-worn child, by the name of Jan van Schouven.

He gave his address, one of the lower West Side, which confirmed the tale of penury and reduced circumstances hinted at by his clothes.

'And the art object to which you wish to lay claim——' said Curtis Henry, his pen posed over the blank he was filling in.

'*Se Old Woman uff Haarlem*, py Rembrandt van Rijn,' said van Schouven simply.

Henry put down his pen and whistled 'Great heavens! You are *that* van Schouven?'

'I wass,' replied van Scholven with such simple dignity that all the questions Henry had been forming were stifled and he confined himself to the questions on the information blank

'Family?'

'My wife iss with me She iss ill ' Some memory of misery and hatred flared in the Dutchman's placid eyes for a moment, a sombre flash of indignities suffered 'My son iss in the English flying My daughter iss a nurse Also in England'

'Value of the picture?'

'It would bring between t'ree hundert and t'ree hundert fifty t'ousand dollars today'

Henry had a sudden insight into what such a sum would mean to a once wealthy merchant who had obviously suffered complete ruin at the hands of the Germans He read the next line 'Proof of ownership ' and then checked himself, but van Schouven chose to reply

'Se picture hass been in our family for generations I belief your expert, Mr Chester Allen Buskirk, knows '

Curtis Henry made a nose at the mention of one of America's foremost art critics and experts 'Ah - Mr Buskirk is a little too internationally art-conscious for us The world recognises the picture as your property' He completed the form and then turned to the little refugee again

'Ah - look here, Mr Van Schouven I'm sorry, but you realise of course that at present we can do no more than list these properties and the whereabouts of their rightful claimants There is very little chance of their being recovered for a considerable period Even after the Germans have been defeated, we '

Van Schouven rose and bowed 'Sank you I realise that. As a refugee honoured with a home in your great country, I only felt it my duty to assist you in your work Some day se time will come

The thing was happening in his eyes again Then it faded He bowed again, put on his shabby hat, and went out

It was on that same day at the end of the thurd leg of the triangle, five thousand three hundred airline miles from New York, that Mr Augustus Swinney was attending a cocktail party in Buenos Aires

From the first, Mr Swinney had found himself fascinated by the intricacies of the diplomatic niceties, the frozen faces and the

delicately balanced situations of a gathering under the sponsorship of a neutral nation

Representatives of belligerent, semi-belligerent, and neutral countries were collected uncomfortably under the same roof, munched at the same buffet table, from carefully studied positions, in which well-tailored but chilly backs formed impregnable circles, or gathered in tight, unassailable little groups in various corners of the two brilliantly lighted and ornate salons given over to the guests, opening the ranks only to admit one whose nationality or politics fitted them into the particular group

Thus the Germans remained a hard core, hard-headed, hard-shirted, dark-suited, immediately beneath the splendid crystal chandelier suspended over the centre of the inner room where the buffet table was located Bright feminine bits of silk drifted towards the dark core, swirled, floated away Small dark Argentinians, distinguished by their dark eyes and English clothes, revolved around the rim, the solid Prussian centre never changed or moved

The British contingent, semi-official and obviously on hand to see what was in the wind, managed to achieve a bland unawareness of the enemy by rallying beneath an excellent Romney hanging in the outer room, a gloomy portrait of the Duchess of Colchester gazing down dispassionately at her countrymen forming their own tight little isle in the swirl of humanity brought out by the exhibition of a new art treasure acquired by Alfonso de Paraná, Argentine millionaire and collector, and sponsored officially by the grey, frosty, super-correct person of Dr José Calderriega, Sub-Minister of Culture of the Argentine Republic

The British were bounded on the north by the Russians, who, looking as though they had slept in their clothes, held together a kind of lumpy and dishevelled front, and on the south by a small satellite island of correct and careful Swiss A small group of Americans, thoroughly ill at ease, remained close to the door for immediate escape in the event of any total loss of social composure Italians and French drifted disconsolate and homeless, unable to create any nucleus that satisfied them In spite of strong rocks of nationalism, the party was kept fluid by the circulating movement of lovely women of indeterminate allegiance and the many glowing-eyed men whose allegiance was plainly and simply to the lovely women

Mr Swinney, free American citizen, cosmopolite, due to his world wanderings as refrigeration engineer and expert for Swift & Co., the meat packers, unhindered by the social quavers that gripped other members of the American colony, drifted, moved,

searched, came and went as he pleased, shouldering his tall, lean figure through the crush of uneasy celebrants

He went everywhere, talking, chatting, listening with his skin as well as with his ears, and avoiding only the existence and perimeter of the dark, ugly core of Nazis, whose presence stank in his nostrils

That two and two added up to four he was still quite certain, but of the real purpose behind this curious yet brilliant gathering he was not at all sure, beyond that it was for the ostensible occasion of viewing a painting, a canvas of sufficient importance to cause the Argentine Sub-Minister of Culture to spread the grey mantle of his sponsorship over the affair. It was only because of this semi-official diplomatic mantle that such an extraordinary mixed group was able to attend

It was also, Mr Swinney knew quite well, because of the quasi-Government sponsorship that social barriers were down, to him as well as three-quarters of those in the rooms. Most of those present would otherwise never have been permitted to set foot in so much as the ante-room of the home of Señor Alfonso de Paraná one of the wealthiest men in the Argentine, and a social figure of importance in Buenos Aires and Paris

The guest list apparently represented a cross-section of the wealth, diplomacy, industry, and international society of Buenos Aires. Mr Swinney was not unaware why *he* in particular had been invited, since, holding the important position of chief refrigeration engineer for Swift & Co., the meat packers, he did belong to the upper stratum of industry

He was also able to reason that since art is generally accepted as an international commodity, this might well account for the international nature of the gathering. But since Mr Swinney was also well aware, as was everyone else present, that their host, de Paraná, was an ardent Argentinian fascist, a supporter of fascist Government policy and an enemy of the Allies, he was alive with curiosity as to the real reasons underlying the gathering

Where Allies and fascists met across the front lines, they shot at one another. Here they mingled and circulated, sipping champagne and nibbling delicacies

It was Mr Swinney's first experience of the grand diplomatic and social lie that covered human behaviour under such circumstances, a lie that was acted out daily in Turkey before it swung to the side of the Allies, in Portugal, in Switzerland, in Buenos Aires. Mortal enemies met, rubbed shoulders, passed, pretended they were not there.

As a cultured American businessman in his early forties, a man at home in five languages and most of the European capitals, this curiously childish kind of pretending amused rather than outraged Mr Swinney. It was the presence of a second lie that aroused his curiosity and vaguely disturbed him. He wondered whether the canvas hanging behind the closed doors of de Paraná's fabulous library, not yet thrown open to the guests, was actually, as rumoured, Rembrandt's famous *Old Woman of Haarlem*. He doubted it. And yet

That was just it. No one had said that this was the picture they had been invited to see, and yet everyone seemed to know. No one said anything, and everyone knew everything—how the Germans were bringing goods into the Argentine, how quinine was being diverted from Bolivia and sent into Germany via Franco Spain, how secret information about a British meat convoy found its way into the hands of the commander of a Nazi submarine wolf pack, how even perhaps a Dutch art treasure might conceivably turn up in Buenos Aires, the Paris of South America.

Once one was careful to maintain the fiction of Argentine neutrality, one seemed to pick up information and knowledge by osmosis, through the pores of the skin. Someone might say casually 'I understand that' and the vague rumour understood would be closer to the truth than the news printed in the controlled press.

Mr Swinney's sane, precise mathematical mind explored and sifted rumour and personalities in an attempt to reduce them to simple denominators such as two and two, which could then be added up to four—the grey, icily proper Dr Calderriega conversing with the British commercial attaché, fat de Paraná, his small nostrils twitching, his dark eyes gleaming sensually above the grey pouches that underlined them, fingering a small, priceless Cellini group and discussing it with a famous French sculptor now resident in Buenos Aires, the tawny, monocled, correct Baron von Schleuder of the German Embassy staff holding a thin-stemmed, gold-speckled Venetian champagne glass between his stubby fingers and exchanging polite small talk with the wife of an Argentine cattle king.

Dammit, it was all so official and correct.

Mathematics and the consequences of the addition of simple sums were driven from the mind of Mr Swinney when he again caught sight of the magnificent woman with the upswept Titian-bronze hair and cat-eyes. She was standing in the inner salon not far from the buffet table conversing with the paunchy little fuss-

budget of a man with the rimless eye-glasses, the gay-nineties stiff collar, and the obvious toupee

'God, she's good-looking,' Mr Swinney said to himself 'I wonder who she is' He had seen her twice before, once during the noon *corso* on the Avenida Florida, and again in the American bar of the Hotel Continental at cocktail time Mr Swinney was a bachelor by choice, but this did not prevent him from becoming profoundly stirred by certain types of woman Woman with cat-eyes and the mysterious, introspective feline expression of countenance that went with them he found irresistible

He edged through the throng and, entering the second salon, moved closer He busied himself at the buffet table and watched her out of the corner of his eye No doubt that her clothes had originally come from Paris Only the French knew how to reveal a classic figure in daytime dress The daring of the purple hat perched atop the thick, bronze-coloured hair fascinated him By Jove, she had the skin to carry it The set of her head on her neck was a challenge to every man in the room Mr Swinney noticed other eyes upon her He determined to meet the challenge in his own way

She and Fuss-budget appeared to know each other well. If he could become acquainted with the fat little man with the toupee .

De Paraná suddenly appeared and joined the two, claiming the girl Swinney hoped that he would name Fuss-budget, but he didn't He said 'Forgive me for robbing you, my dear friend It is only for an instant I swear I will return the Countess to you in a few moments'

Fuss-budget's head waggled archly at the top of his stiff collar and he bowed and turned to the buffet table, loaded with the delicacies of five continents Mr Swinney contrived to be next to him.

Mr Swinney was surprised to note that Fuss-budget did not smell of mothballs as he had expected For he was a small, self-sufficient left-over from another era, the professional gentleman of the old school, and obviously an epicure

He tasted the grey Malossol caviar and nibbled at Hungarian pâté, savouring texture and flavour But the full expression of his ecstasy he reserved for the paper-thin, near-transparent slices of smoked, fuchsia-coloured ham He tasted He chewed He swallowed He closed his eyes with reminiscent delight When he opened them it was to find a tall, spare gentleman with a craggy, hawk-like face, long, strong nose, and dark hair, sprinkled with

grey at the side, eating of the same ham and smiling at him sympathetically

'By Jove!' said Fuss-budget 'Genuine Westphalian ham Perfectly cured'

'Delicious,' said Mr Swinney

The little man polished his glasses with a scented silk handkerchief, replaced them, examined the old, dark-red ham from which the slices came, and helped himself to another portion 'Haven't tasted a real one for years Don't know why they can get it here and we can't up in New York'

Mr Swinney could have told him It was one of the things that one knew – by osmosis again – when one lived in Buenos Aires It was small in bulk like so many other of the German products that one could always find in Buenos Aires stores – the Leica cameras, the fine lenses and optical goods, the rare drugs and medicines labelled 'I G Farben, Berlin'

But he was not of the mind to alarm or astonish the little man, but rather to make friends with him

'The secret lies in the process of smoking But have you ever tried one of our old Argentine hams? We have our own process of ageing and curing The hams are first soaked in wine for weeks'

The little man's ears cocked like a terrier's and his nostrils flared

'Really? You mean better than—?'

'Tenderer The flavour is unique They are never exported'

Fuss-budget licked his lips, then glanced at Mr Swinney 'But, ah – you are an American, are you not?'

'I am with Swift & Company I should be delighted some time if you would care to sample—'

The man sighed regretfully. 'Unfortunately, I am flying back in the morning' Then he added importantly 'I flew down only yesterday at the invitation of Dr Calderriega. Hm – it would really be a new taste experience Of course, there is no question as to the superiority of Argentine beef'

Mr Swinney was thinking to himself 'Now, who the devil could you be? Flew down from New York at the invitation of the Argentine Sub-Minister of Culture I suppose I ought to know you, but I don't'

De Paraná returned with the cat-eyed girl on his arm and returned her to Fuss-budget '*Voilà, mon ami!* As I promised' The little man bowed in the manner of one careful not to disturb the set of a toupee. For an instant they made a little group of which Swinney was the outsider Fuss-budget hastened to per-

form the politeness. He said to Mr Swinney 'Ah, I did not catch your name, sir'

'Swinney Augustus Swinney'

'Of course - Countess Amalie, may I present Mr Augustus Swinney? The Countess Amalie Czernok. You know de Paraná of course'

The Countess Amalie gave Mr Swinney her wide cat-smile and accepted him with her eyes. He was startled to find them violet-coloured, the shade of her hat.

Later, when they were alone, he said 'I schemed to meet you. Are you angry?'

She spoke with an accent that might have been French. 'Not at all. I saw you scheming. That is why I came back. It is always flattering to a woman when she sees an attractive man make up his mind to meet her.'

Mr Swinney made a mental note. 'Aha, then she was watching. I wonder whether she noticed me in the Continental.' He said 'I intruded myself shamelessly upon the little man. By the way, who is he?'

'That is Mr Buskirk, the art critic. Surely you know Mr Chester Allen Buskirk. I met him many years ago in Paris. He is so sweet and old-fashioned.'

Buskirk. Buskirk, the art critic, greatest living expert on the old masters. Flown down from New York to Buenos Aires at the invitation of Dr José Calderriega. Now, what did that add up to if one was still convinced that in spite of the super-impeccability of congealed diplomatic face, two and two made four?

'You are French, Countess?'

'Part French, part Polish.'

'A combination that inevitably results in a beautiful woman.'

'You look like an American, but you do not talk like one. You have been to Paris too?'

Before he could reply, there was a sudden stir in the room, a kind of mass awareness of a change in the routine and the beginning of a movement through the second salon towards the massive carved-oak doors leading to the library.

The doors which previously had been shut were now swung back. The Countess Amalie drew in her breath and sighed. 'Ah, the picture. Now we are permitted to see the picture. Are you not excited?'

'You mean Rembrandt's *Old Woman of Haarlem*?'

'Then you heard too?'

'One hears a great many things. I don't believe it.'

'You do not believe it?' In the light from the crystal chandelier

overhead, her eyes were wide and luminous 'But why should it not be possible?'

'Because,' said Mr Swinney, flatly, 'they wouldn't dare'

But he found out when he came into the library and saw what hung on the wall of Brazilian teakwood panelling that they did dare, after all, that two and two still added up, and four made a very ugly number

In Munich, Kunstverwaltungsrat Bressar was burning the lights late in his office in the Pmakotheek, poring over lists marked 'Final shipment following liquidation Cracow Museum, Cracow, occupied Poland,' and occasionally earmarking items for the Argentine

In New York, Jan van Schouven, the little Dutchman with the tired-child expression and the desperate eyes, stood in the dingy hall outside the dingy furnished room and listened to the doctor say 'Madam van Schouven is a little better tonight However, if it were at all possible I would say it was almost imperative that she be moved to a warmer climate, at least for a time . '

And in a tiny cove just outside Avellaneda, some twenty-five miles south of Buenos Aires on the Río de la Plata, an impatient U-boat captain sat in the steel cell of his quarters reading over a three-weeks-old copy of the *Völkische Beobachter*, digesting for the tenth time the accounts of the Wehrmacht's glorious advances to the rear in Russia and wondering how long it would be before the orders came through from the Embassy in Buenos Aires to unload his cargo, pick up the return load of tungsten, molybdenum, platinum, and quinine, and put to sea He was tired, anyway, of being a damned freighter There was no Knight's-Cross with oak leaves for that kind of work

Mr Augustus Swinney looked up at Rembrandt's magnificent and touching masterpiece, the *Old Woman of Haarlem*, beautifully hung on the panelled wall of de Paraná's library over the fifteenth-century Spanish fireplace, softly but glowingly lit to bring out all the deep warmth of the tones of gold and brown He thought of the last time that he had gazed on its breathtaking perfection

It had been in Amsterdam, he remembered, in 1938 He had dined at the home of a business acquaintance, Mynheer Jan van Schouven, a wealthy tobacco merchant with plantations in Sumatra They had been discussing the possibility of the use of refrigeration for the preservation of tobacco in transit over long distances.

Van Schouven lived in a timber house in Amsterdam that was four hundred years old. After the evening repast Vrouw van Schouven and her young son and daughter excused themselves and retired. The tobacco-grower had led Mr Swinney into the library to drink Javanese coffee, smoke the strong black cigars of twisted Sumatran tobacco, and inhale the fragrance of a brandy that was laid down the year Wellington cornered Napoleon at Waterloo, not far to the south.

The ceiling timbers of the room were of blackened oak, the deep chairs of oak and leather. Candlelight shone on soft pewter and the glistening leather backs of old books. Many candles illuminated the glowing, lifelike portrait of a wrinkled old woman in a heavy carved gold frame that hung casually on the wall opposite the beamed fireplace where its surface would catch the reflection from the curling coloured tongues of driftwood flame.

Mr Swinney had not been able to take his eyes from it. Not only the portrait fascinated him, but the concept of its hanging. It was displayed not as an art treasure, but as a part of the warm, richly sombre decoration of the old room, as an object, Mr Swinney felt, that had occupied its place for a long, long time.

To van Schouven he said finally, indicating the portrait, 'How that lives, how warm and kindly it makes this room! . . .'

Van Schouven nodded, drawing on his black cigar until the end glowed. 'It iss called se *Old Woman of Haarlem*. My ancestor Piet van Schouven received it from Rembrandt in payment of a debt. Piet made for Rembrandt a pair of Leiden boots of Spanish leather. It iss so rechistered in his account book.' Van Schouven smiled his placid Dutch smile. 'Se story iss told that my ancestor considered himself ill used in se exchange. Se leather cost him eleven florins . . .'

That evening had always remained in Mr Swinney's memory as a kind of island of deep peace and the ancient culture of living, standing out brightly in the turbulent streams of his travels.

The Germans had brought fire and flame and their new order to Amsterdam. Now the *Old Woman of Haarlem* gazed down at him with her wise, aged eyes peering out from beneath the white wimple from the panelled wall of another library in Buenos Aires. The heavy, two-foot-square gold frame was a different one, but there was no mistaking the picture. To have seen it once was to know and recognise it for ever.

The spell of Swinney's memories was broken when the Countess Amalie spoke softly at his side. Curiously she used almost the same words that had come to Swinney at his first

sight of the masterpiece 'How it lives!' and then she added 'What would one not give to possess such beauty!'

A kind of bitter wave shook Mr Swinney at the sound of the word 'possess' 'possess' To possess, the Germans had charred, blackened, and defiled the neighbour nations of Europe

The guests had been filing into the massive library They formed into their careful patterns, the Germans grouped in the far corner beneath the fifteenth-century Flemish tapestry whose warm reds and blues set off the pasty white of their faces, which were beginning to show signs of strain The correct, tawny Baron von Schleuder was pale too He kept licking his lips, affixing and removing his monocle, and staring at the picture

The British shifted their island close to the massive carved Spanish table and whispered amongst themselves, the French and Italians gesticulated and made approving noises The Argentines formed a group close to the picture itself, with the suave, grey, icily cold Dr Calderriega, de Paraná flushed and excited, and Chester Allen Buskirk polishing his glasses briskly as a nucleus

Mr Swinney felt the tension that lay beneath the exclamations and the high-pitched conversations in the room and understood it His own mathematics were complete The sum of two and two still made four The trial balloon was about to go up

He said to himself 'Clever Calderriega He'll help them get rid of their loot, but he doesn't trust his dear Nazi friends any farther than he can see them.'

Mr Chester Allen Buskirk, having wiped the last speck off the windows of his lenses, adjusted his pince-nez, cleared his throat, and stepped towards the painting, which hung just above eye-level An uneasy hush broken only by whisperings fell over the room

Buskirk took full advantage of the centre of the stage He cocked his head gingerly, he stepped away, he stepped closer to examine the texture of the paint, he stepped away again

'God,' thought Swinney, 'you've got it in your hands, little man Tell 'em it's a fake and you'll spike them Surely *you* know who owns that picture'

Buskirk cleared his throat again, removed his pince-nez, and turned to de Paraná and Calderriega 'Unquestionably authentic! Unquestionably Rembrandt's *Old Woman of Haarlem*!'

The German group stirred first, shifting and turning Several of them used their handkerchiefs. Baron von Schleuder gazed sternly and fixedly at the picture and said 'Colossal!' French and Italian shoulders were lifted higher, the Argentines broke into a torrent

of excited Spanish, and the cynical whisperings of the British increased, the Russians glowered. There were no other Americans in the room besides Mr Swinney and Buskirk.

The fussy, self-important little art expert was perfectly conscious of the figure he was cutting. He drifted over towards Mr Swinney, attracted by the light from the tower of the Countess Amalie's bronze-coloured hair.

The Countess turned her wide-set huntress's eyes on the little man and said 'What learning was embodied in that simple statement!'

Buskirk preened himself. 'Learning? No. It is an emotion. Learning may be prey to error, the emotions aroused by the perfect blending of intellect with light and colour, never.'

'Damn your emotion,' said Mr Augustus A. Swinney, sharply.

Buskirk started so that his pince-nez fell into his hand. 'I beg your pardon, sir!'

Mr Swinney's voice was cold and cutting. 'There is also such a thing as ethics.'

Buskirk was confused, but with the slyly feline eyes of the girl moving from him to Swinney and back again, he retreated behind an epigram.

'Art is not concerned with ethics, but with truth.'

'Bunk!' said Mr Swinney, his voice made harsh by his rising anger. 'You know to whom that picture belongs - and God knows where he is or what the Germans did to him. And yet, knowing it, you identified the picture for a pack of Nazi thieves in cut-away coats.'

Buskirk became thoroughly flustered under the attack. Heat rising to his face fogged his glasses and he fell to polishing them furiously. 'I am acquainted with van Schouven. He is now in New York. He may have sold the picture.'

'Did you inquire?'

Buskirk felt that he was being interrogated like a little boy and was being humiliated before the stunning and dramatic-looking Countess, who was now watching only Mr Swinney with a curious expression at the corners of her full mouth. He drew himself up and attempted extrication.

'That is none of my concern, sir. There is an American branch of the International Art Salvage Commission to which van Schouven can turn to press a claim. I do not deal with property rights, ha hum, but with the limitless horizons of eternal art.' He stole a quick look at the Countess Amalie and thought he detected a flicker of approval in her face and felt encouraged to continue.

'Truth in art is not a matter of a bill of sale, sir The fruits
'Hush!' said Mr Swinney, curtly, the way one might have spoken to a child, but there was distaste on his lips He looked down at Buskirk from his lean, clean height 'You are a living, walking, talking anachronism You are as bad as they You condone It is time the world learned a better truth than yours – that nothing matters but the difference between right and wrong'

The Countess Amalie drew in a deep breath and veiled her eyes with her kohl-darkened lids

Buskirk blustered 'You are insulting, sir I am here as the guest of a Government official'

'That's just it,' said Mr Swinney, but he said it to the retreating, outraged back of the little art expert

'You have hurt his feelings,' said the Countess Amalie

'Damn and hell,' said Mr Swinney from the depths of his growing anger 'It is sickening'

He stopped speaking and the Countess turned her enveloping gaze on him interrogatively to see whether he would continue and tell what was sickening

Mr Swinney did not do so His thin lips closed and his indignant eyes roved over the room and the restless groups of people. But he knew – quite everything The pattern was clear, unmistakable, and mathematically logical, but it was the perverted, graceless mathematics of the most evil men the world had ever known

For three years the Germans had been looting captured Europe of its art treasures Over and beyond what the Goerings and von Ribbentrops had pilfered for themselves and their estates, millions upon millions of dollars' worth of world-famous and historic paintings, sculptures, and antiquities had been pouring into Munich from gutted museums of Poland, Holland, France, Belgium, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Russia, and Norway, from galleries and private collections stripped bare, from ransacked homes

Mr Swinney knew that in every occupied city Quislings had waited with lists prepared of every art object of value in the vicinity Like locusts the Gestapo and party boys had descended upon the communities with vans and trucks and carted it away Germany might be losing the war in the military sense, but her thieves had cornered the art market of the world Now the discredited and bankrupt party heelers were preparing to fence the swag for the dollar credits needed to bolster their collapsing financial bastions

The German mind was no mystery to Mr Swinney, who had travelled among them and done business with them Crude and

brash though their methods were, they knew they needed a sponsor for their transactions at least once removed from their persons, some group to act at once as window dressing, front, and buffer and raise some slight incense smoke screen of legitimacy to offset the stench of intrinsic German crookedness

What was more logical than to turn to the strongest and wealthiest and most powerful South American nation, the only one whose Government was openly friendly and helpful to the Nazis and secretly hostile to the United States and the Allies?

Even Mr Swinney had to admit that the use of the name of Dr José Calderriega as sponsor of the exhibition had been brilliantly conceived. For if this show was not exactly a Government affair, yet Dr Calderriega was *of* the Government, as Sub-Minister of Culture. The Germans had calculated well that his name and position would stifle criticism and opposition from the outset.

The use of Alfonso de Paraná had been clever too. Known as one of the wealthiest men in the country, and connoisseur of art in his own right, with a notable private collection, the turning up of a famous picture in his possession was just the right touch.

But Mr Swinney had no illusions about de Paraná. He was an out-and-out fascist and Germanophile. Enough of the booty would stick to his fingers to make it worth his while, but his role was strictly that of middleman. Mr Swinney thought with disgust of the greed that would bring art dealers through these salons in the days to come, perhaps some of his own countrymen among them.

Nor did Mr Swinney need the rumours, or pickups, or snatches of conversation caught on the fly to tell him how the stuff was to get there. Light, small, compact, a rolled-up canvas by Raphael would fit into any cranny in an undersea boat, a twelfth-century triptych, a medallion by Benvenuto Cellini, a tapestry by Gobelin, ancient jewelled candlesticks from Polish churches, encrusted chalices of the early popes, would take up little more space. One U-boat could load enough boodle to pay for a day of war. Mr Swinney had no doubt that a Nazi submarine was lurking somewhere nearby, waiting to unload the rest of its cargo if it had not already done so.

Once they had got away with the transfer and sale of the Rembrandt as a trial, the Nazis would flood the market for all the traffic would bear. It all dovetailed, even to that pompous ass Buskirk.

Fascists or no fascists, Calderriega and de Paraná were no

fools *They* knew their Germans and had cleverly protected themselves against having a fake put over on them. But in addition Buskirk's presence had served to set a further seal upon the affair.

A kind of silence fell over the room again, and Mr Swinney saw that the icily grey Dr Calderriega was about to say a few words. They came out in Spanish, as neat and clipped as his grey moustache, as tight and spare and reserved as his figure.

'Presence of this great painting under the roof of Señor de Paraná—milestone in and monument to Latin-American culture—congratulations due this great art patron of Buenos Aires—'

The Germans nudged one another, smirked, raised their champagne glasses as in a military drill, and said '*Hoch!*'

A few desultory 'Hear, hears' came from the British contingent, a Frenchman cried '*Epatant!*' the Russians glowered silently and shifted their feet uncomfortably. People in the room milled about a little.

Mr Swinney's gorge rose 'Fire and damnation,' he thought to himself 'Not only I know, *they all know!* Every one of them! Everyone here knows, and the Germans and that grey Argentine and the fat one with the pouches know they know, and are ramming it down their throats.'

This, then, was the second lie that was being circulated there that afternoon, as lightly as the canapés and the Venetian cocktail glasses, as hushed and hidden as that other diplomatic fiction of the non-presence of diplomats of countries engaged in war.

The British knew—it was in their tight lips and frigid bearing. The Russians knew, and showed it in their scowls and uneasily moving feet. The Swiss, the Slavs, the French, the Italians knew it. The Spaniards were laughing up their sleeves. The fashionably gowned women knew it, and showed it in the sly casting of their eyes and the heads bent forward to whisper. The men from the embassies had known it for weeks and merely moved a little more stiffly from the hips.

Everyone was privy to the same logic, the same reasoning, the same rumours, the same information as Mr Augustus A. Swinney, simple loyal American citizen, refrigeration engineer and fascist-hater.

But no one said anything.

Over them all, like an unseen, viscous garment, constricting and attenuating thought and movement and behaviour, lay the cloak of diplomatic conduct. The soft net of protocol was tougher than steel. They might know what they knew, or whisper behind their hands what they pleased, but until something was said or

done, the truth that they knew was not a truth at all, but a lie sealed in their bosoms

Cleverly the net spun in the musty office of the Pinakothek had been cast the long way from Munich and ensnared them all

That is, with one notable and fatal exception, that exception being the curious mathematical mind of Mr Swinney, who lived by the addition of two and two

Alfonso de Paraná was replying to the speech of the Sub-Minister of Culture, his voice oily with success and content.

'Let us not say that I am to be congratulated, but rather Argentina. The country that is permitted to be the host to such a peerless work of art is fortunate indeed. I am proud . . '

Between the end of the speech, the polite murmurs of applause, the reiterated '*Hoch*' of the Nazis, and what Mr Swinney said and did, no more than a second or two elapsed. But in that brief interim in which his limbs were chill with rage, his mind leaped back to a tale he remembered reading as a boy, the story of the King's new suit of clothes, in which the three rascally tailors clad the King with imaginary thread and fabric, and none in the sycophant court dared contradict that the non-existent garment was not as beautiful as they claimed it to be.

He remembered even, as sharply as though it had been thrown up on a screen before him, the illustration of the King walking through the streets mother-naked, past the cheering throngs lined up to view his fine new suit, the tram-bearer behind, holding up the ends of the non-existent cloak. And he remembered the little child in the throng at the kerb who looked up and cried 'But the King hasn't any clothes on!'

Mr Swinney took a sudden step forward, quite unaware of the gentle, detaining touch of the hand of the Countess Amalie upon his arm. His voice, clear, incisive, and steady, cut through the room and sheared a gaping rent in the binding fabric that ensnared them all.

'That picture has been stolen!'

In the awful silence someone dropped a glass and it shivered daintily with the sound of a Balinese cymbal.

Dr José Calderriega, stiff, motionless, frosty as an icicle, sucked in his breath like a Japanese. Only his eyes were alive. No one moved. De Paraná blinked heavily. A slow purple crept into the pouches beneath his heavy eyes.

Mr Swinney spoke again, and because there was now no sound but the tinkle and rustle and chatter from the outer salon, his voice had the terrible quality of a sledgehammer shattering heavy glass:

'That picture was stolen by the Germans in Amsterdam from a private house. It is the property of Mynheer Jan van Schouven, a Dutch refugee now living in New York.'

A voice hissed in German '*Was hat er gesagt?*' and was immediately stifled. The monocle of Baron von Schleuder dropped into his hand with a little meaty sound. Still no one moved. They were all in the grip of the horror that comes when a terrible truth is held aloft by the hair like a Gorgon's head to stare them to stone.

But Dr José Calderriega, Sub-Minister of Culture, was in the grip of a worse horror than that. For the first time in his grey, icy, correct diplomatic life he was face to face with an insoluble situation. His breath kept hissing in and out between his grey lips and a kind of film like a lizard's lids had come over his eyes.

Mr Swinney moved forward slowly with a measured pace, a careful rhythm. It brought him to where the picture hung upon the panelled wall. It was as though he himself was the captive of a dream as he faced them once more. He said, quietly this time, to hold the static mood.

'I am removing this picture, which is the property of no one present, and taking it into custody until it can be returned to its rightful owner.'

He lifted the picture from the wall, tucked the heavy frame under his arm, and began his fantastic march from the room.

He should have been pinioned, leaped upon, held, stopped a thousand times, but he was not. They were hypnotised by the shocking audacity of what he had said and what he was doing. For, that first dangerous moment, they did not even believe what they were seeing.

Three steps, four steps. The cat-eyes of the Countess Amalie were round and staring and deep violet, and her small white teeth were showing like seeds through the red fruit of her lips.

Five - six - seven through the open lane. The British were grinning. A big Russian had his head thrown back and mouth open in silent laughter. The Germans were blocked off in the far corner of the room. Mr Swinney could no longer see them. When—? When would someone leap upon his back and carry him to the floor?

Nine, ten. He was through the door and into the buffet room. He saw the back of Buskirk's toupee at the buffet table. The little man was helping himself to some more ham and did not turn around. Another moment and Mr Swinney was in the outer salon.

No one there paid any attention to a tall gentleman carrying a

gold picture frame under his arm, though several made room politely to permit him to pass

'How long? How long?' Mr Swinney thought to himself 'How long have I? They are none of them men of action except von Schleuder, and he has none of his Nazi thugs with him. They are all gentlemen and not used to direct action. But sooner or later they must

He was on the broad, carved staircase of ancient Spanish oak that curved to the marble foyer below

Now at last from above he was conscious of confused sounds at higher pitch than normal cocktail-party babel, a cry and a muffled thumping

Through the greatest effort of his life, Mr Swinney did not quicken his step, but kept his even, measured tread, nodded pleasantly to the footman who opened the heavy, grilled wrought-iron door for him, and went out into the balmy January summer twilight

The lights were just beginning to come on bordering the broad, tree-lined Avenida Alvear. Slick, shiny cars with liveried chauffeurs and footmen waited in a long, elegant line for their masters outside the white mansion of Señor de Paraná. A green-and-black-checked taxicab drifted by. Mr Swinney hailed it and climbed in. '*Vamos al ciudad - tan deprisa como pueda!*'

'Sí, señor'

The cab moved away down the broad residential avenue in the direction of the city.

When the first of the pursuit led by the tawny-headed Baron von Schleuder and Señor de Paraná poured into the street, there was nothing to be seen of either Mr Augustus Swinney or the *Old Woman of Haarlem*, or, for that matter, to indicate where they had gone

The driver leaned back and inquired 'Where to, señor?' and when he received no reply, knocked on the window separating him from his passenger and inquired again, but received only a vague wave to proceed. Mr Augustus A. Swinney was suffering from reaction. He was quite incapable for the moment of telling where he wanted to go or what he wanted to do

He thought to himself 'Great and little gods, what have I done, and why did I do it? Whatever possessed me? And what will I do next? And furthermore what will *they* do?'

Mr Swinney needed time to think, to collect himself, to prepare for the unquestionably unpleasant consequences that were certain to follow upon the heels of his rash act.

•

He rapped on the window '18, Calle Garibaldi Swift & Company'

'*Si, señor!*'

When Mr Swinney was in trouble or needed to reflect, somehow he gravitated to his office over the giant refrigerating plant near the waterfront docks. He could think there.

It was a little after six o'clock when he arrived and paid off the driver. Still bearing the heavy gold frame of the portrait carefully under his arm, he let himself in with his night key and went up the stairs.

Later, in the library of Alfonso de Paraná, Dr Calderriega was addressing a group of the guests. The doors to the library were shut. Beyond in the other two salons the party still continued.

He said with icy self-containment 'Only you who were present in this room and who are here now were witness to - what occurred here. It is of the utmost importance to the Government that no hint, no word of this is permitted to leak out. If there is such a leak, we shall know where and how to trace it and the consequences will be of the utmost seriousness. We have to deal obviously with a man who is either drunk or insane. The picture will be recovered shortly. Until that time I must insist upon your silence.'

But still later, closeted in another room with de Paraná and Baron von Schleuder, Dr Calderriega was not quite so certain, though his doubts were never permitted to penetrate the smooth, cold correctness of his exterior.

The Baron adjusted his monocle and stared coldly at Dr Calderriega.

'Na, my friend. You are in a pretty fix.'

Dr Calderriega elevated his grey eyebrows an eighth of an inch, the most violent display of emotion permitted himself. 'If you will permit me, Herr Baron, so are you.'

'Pah! Let me handle it my way and we will have the picture back in an hour. Who is this maniac?'

De Paraná consulted a small slip of paper. 'His name is Augustus A. Swinney. He is an American engineer employed by Swift & Company. He lives alone in an apartment at No. 17 Avenida Manuel Quintana.'

Dr Calderriega made a note of the address. 'I will pay a visit to this gentleman and persuade him to return it.'

The Baron said significantly 'If you do not succeed - we shall take steps. If this man escapes'

'My dear Baron,' said Dr Calderriega patiently, 'consider the

utter impossibility of a man, the employee of a large American firm, leaving Buenos Aires accompanied by one of the most valuable pictures in the world. But in meantime I strongly suggest that you hold the further development of this transaction in abeyance. I will be in touch with you and with Señor de Paraná later in the evening.

In New York City, where it was an hour earlier, Curtis Henry said to his wife over cocktails: 'I can't get that little Dutchman, van Schouven, out of my mind. He's got such dignity. There's a fellow who once had the best of everything, probably living on nothing now. I doubt whether even his own countrymen here know how hard up he must be. I wonder what one could do for a chap like that. Probably nothing.'

In the damp, bare dingy room that looked out over the dirty, noisy, winter-bound slum street, Jan van Schouven pondered over what the doctor had told him of the dire necessity of moving the woman with whom he had lived for all his life in faith and harmony to a warmer climate and wondered what he should do, for there was nothing more left to sell. And because he did not know, he did something he and many of his people had learned to do since the coming of the war. He turned to prayer and asked for help.

In South America, too, darkness had fallen over the little cove outside of Avellaneda where the captain of the U-boat was playing *skat* with the first officer. He said: 'What the devil is the matter with that fellow von Schleuder that we did not hear from him? Why can't we get that damned bric-à-brac ashore and get out of here?'

The first officer took a trick: 'We will probably hear from him tomorrow.'

The captain spat: 'Tomorrow - tomorrow. Always tomorrow. Some day tomorrow will be too late for Germany.'

It was shortly after seven o'clock when Mr Swinney emerged from the warehouse on the Calle Garibaldi, still tenderly lugging a square wrapped bundle under his arm. The edges of the heavy carved and gilded frame peered out from heavy swathings of burlap that Mr Swinney had wrapped around it to keep it from harm or damage.

He had to walk a block or two before he found a taxicab. He gave the driver the address of his apartment, No. 17 Avenida Manuel Quintana, and was more than a little impatient of the heavy traffic in the central part of the town because he was

expecting visitors. He was rather anxious to arrive before his callers

At that, he just did Gabino, his houseman, let him in

'Anyone call, Gabino?'

'No, señor'

'Very well I am expecting some visitors I will answer the door myself If I should need anything I will call you'

Mr Swinney lived in a modern three-room apartment on the sixth floor The large multipaned windows of the living-room looked out on the quiet, tree-lined avenue A small vestibule led from the outer door to this room Beyond was a small dining-room and a bedroom

Mr Swinney placed his package on the chrome mantel over the modern decorative but non-functional fireplace facing the entrance hallway, but he did not remove the protective burlap wrapping Where the bright gilt of the frame protruded, it showed up like pirate gold against the severe stainless steel of the mantel panelling

Thereafter he had only time to light a cigarette and go to his bookshelf and briefly examine a small volume before the door buzzer sounded Mr Swinney replaced the book and opened the door It was, as he had expected, Dr José Calderriega, Sub-Minister of Culture of the Argentine

Dr Calderriega came through the vestibule and into the living-room with a quick, nervous step, but he paused on the threshold for an instant as his gaze fell upon the mantel He said 'Ah'

'Yes,' said Mr Swinney 'Won't you sit down, sir?'

Dr Calderriega sat on the edge of a chrome fauteuil, a perfection of a man in every small, icy detail, from his polished shoes to his faultless head Age had not altered his appearance or the smoothness of his skin, it had merely frosted him There was also frost in his voice as he inquired.

'You are Mr Augustus Swinney?'

'I am'

'May I inquire before going any further, Mr Swinney, whether this was a practical joke?'

'No,' said Mr Swinney softly, but definitely 'It was not a practical joke'

Dr Calderriega's lips relaxed and he nodded slightly Mr Swinney thought 'Now that he has ascertained that I am neither drunk nor a maniac, he has had to back off and begin all over again I must be careful to keep this conversation on a high diplomatic plane or he will be shocked and disappointed Well, we shall see'

Mr Swinney, we will overlook your indefensible behaviour if you will permit me to leave with the picture and restore it to Señor de Paraná'

'That is generous, Dr Calderriega I regret, I cannot permit it'

'I see And what do you intend to do with it?'

'Secure it until I am able to restore it to its owner'

'The owner is Señor Alfonso de Paraná'

Mr Swinney rose with a small sigh 'Under those circumstances I can no longer discuss the matter with you, Dr Calderriega. Stealing is a matter for the police I suggest that you call them. I will notify the American Embassy that I am ready to submit to arrest'

Dr Calderriega sighed also, but like a dried leaf blown on ice 'Sit down, Mr Swinney There is—ah—no question of the police—at the moment What is it you want?'

'To return the picture to its actual owner, Mynheer van Schouven'

Dr Calderriega coughed 'You are certain of your ground? Supposing no proof of previous ownership exists?'

Mr Swinney nodded 'I understand the Germans have shown their usual thoroughness in destroying all records, indices, and proofs of ownership in connection with their national thieving expeditions However——' He paused, but he was not looking at the Sub-Minister His eyes had wandered to his bookshelves across the room He then tried very hard to suppress a grin, but was unable to and let it happen He went over to the shelf and plucked out a small red volume, the one he had examined previously

'The Germans, Dr Calderriega, should have liquidated one of their most prolific cataloguers before they undertook their tour of looting The evidence of their own uncle Karl Baedeker will yet brand them as the most shameless nation of burglars the world has ever known'

He thumbed through the little book 'Do you remember these little guide-books clutched to the breasts of Americans rushing about Europe? Baedeker's *Belgium and Holland*, 1930, page 257, Amsterdam—the Rijks Museum. I quote. "First floor third room on the right is hung Rembrandt's masterpiece *Old Woman of Haarlem*, parenthesis, on loan for five years by its owner, J van Schouven, close parenthesis This magnificent head, in the warmest tones of the master, depicts ' Well, the canvas is quite well described Any court of law would recognise this as evidence.'

Dr Calderriega exhaled slowly and correctly A single glusten-

ing bead of water no bigger than a seed pearl appeared beside the close-clipped grey moustache. Finally he said softly 'Do you really believe, Mr Swinney, that you will be able to remove this picture from Buenos Aires?'

Mr Swinney considered the question for a moment before he replied 'Yes, I believe I will.'

'Permit me to say that you are playing a dangerous game, sir.'

'Permit me to say that you are too, doctor. Your name appears upon the invitation as sponsor to the exhibition of Señor de Paraná.'

A second bead, in perfect balance, appeared on the other side of the Sub-Minister's lip. Mr Swinney wondered whether they were both congealed there.

For the first time Dr Calderriega's voice took on an edge-like a figure skater grating a blade on a turn. 'You understand, sir, that the Government is not officially involved.'

'Naturally,' said Mr Swinney with a slight bow. 'It is obviously beneath the dignity of the government of Argentina to assist in — ah — the disposal of purloined articles. Still, publicity would be regrettable. The Argentinian people might not understand.'

The shudder that Dr Calderriega gave at the word 'publicity' was almost human.

'However,' continued Mr Swinney, 'it seems to me that no publicity is necessary, if—'

Dr Calderriega leaned forward slightly. 'If—?'

'If the art market in Buenos Aires were closed to — foreign export, the subject would never come up, I feel certain.'

'Ah. It is perhaps fortunate that the Ministry of Culture has the final say in — such matters.'

'As you say, it is most fortunate.'

Dr Calderriega rose and gazed for a moment at the object on the mantel. Something approaching a groan burst from him. 'It is impossible! Impossible! Do you realise that there will be other — forces interested in the repossession of that picture, forces that will stop at nothing — absolutely nothing?'

'That,' said Mr Swinney succinctly, 'is your worry as much as mine, Dr Calderriega. I wish you luck. Good evening.'

Shortly after the Sub-Minister had left, Mr Swinney went to the window and looked down into the street. He saw two policemen in their dark-blue uniforms with black leather puttees, Sam Browne belts, and peaked caps with red bands. They strolled fifty yards up the street, then stopped and strolled back again.

Mr Swinney smiled. He thought 'I'd give a lot to know whether they're there to keep me in or to keep others out.'

He did not trust Dr Caldeiriega. When a man walks the thin crust of such scandal, disgrace, and disaster as the Sub-Minister trod, he might also be tempted to join those forces that would stop at nothing.

He wondered when those would begin to arrive.

It was nearly nine o'clock before Baron von Schleuder let himself out of the self-operating lift at the sixth floor of Number 17 Avenida Manuel Quintana and pressed the button outside Mr Swinney's door.

Upon being admitted, the Baron entered briskly and with an air of busy determination. He was a large man with one of those large-featured faces which look as though they had been fashioned roughly in putty. His tawny, leonine hair was slicked back from his forehead and he wore his monocle. He, too, paused at the living-room threshold, stared stonily at the exhibit on the mantel, and said 'So.'

Mr Swinney made no comment, nor did he invite the Baron to sit down. Instead he remained silent, waiting for the conversation to open. The Baron permitted his monocle to drop into his left hand and said 'Mr Swinney?'

'Yes?'

'Von Schleuder! Cherman Embassy!' His sentences came out curt and harsh, like military commands. 'We will speak about this picture.'

Mr Swinney replied 'Very well. Who are you representing? Señor de Paraná?'

'Certainly not!'

'I see. The German Government, then?'

Baron von Schleuder opened his large lips to reply and then closed them firmly and glared at Mr Swinney.

'It is not a question of who I represent. The picture must be returned immediately.'

'I don't recognise your authority.'

'By what right do you presume to keep this picture?'

'Well,' said Mr Swinney reflectively, glancing at the gilt-edged bundle on the mantel, 'let us say the right of immediate possession. You had it. De Paraná had it. Now I have it. I might add that I got it the same way your Government did. I took it.'

Von Schleuder's thoughts playing over his heavy face were as transparent as a newly washed window.

Mr Swinney said quietly 'Are you thinking of trying to take it from me physically? It would raise the most awful row. People would come.'

'Ach!' said the Baron, 'don't be ridiculous. That kind of extra-

vagances is for romances' He suddenly made an elephantine gesture that was supposed to indicate change of attitude, good-fellowship, and a newfound understanding 'Let us play all the cards on the table, Mr Swinney We wish the picture returned of your own will What is your price?'

Mr Swinney looked as innocent as a newborn child 'I would have to get in touch with the owner, Mynheer van Schouven from whom the picture was originally stolen by the Germans I doubt whether he would wish to sell it to you'

The Baron was not amused He abandoned his jovial air as quickly as he assumed it 'Ah so! Well, you have ask for trouble You will have only yourself to blame'

'That's better,' said Mr Swinney 'That's how we love you'

The Baron gave Mr Swinney a measuring and even slightly quizzical look in which he raised his brows a full inch, like a tenor on a high note.

'Well,' he said at last in the conversational tone of one who is about to take his departure, having concluded his business, 'at least we understand one another I hope you do not get hurt, Mr Swinney If you attempt to remove this picture from this room, much less from Buenos Aires, you will do so at your own risk, is that not so?'

'Thanks,' said Mr Swinney 'I'll let you know when it gets to New York Then you and Calderriega both will be able to relax And, ah - I usually shoot at burglars'

The Baron smiled a quiet, lemony smile, replaced his monocle, glanced once more at the object on the mantel, and departed Mr Swinney went to the window and saw the Baron emerge into the street. Three men climbed out of a car parked at the kerb The Baron spoke to them briefly, entered the car, and drove away The three remained standing in the shadows Mr Swinney was under no illusions as to what *their* presence meant

Mr Swinney was also under no illusions as to his position He was in a fix and he knew it If because of circumstances Calderriega and von Schleuder were unable for the moment to avail themselves of normal procedures to recover the painting, neither was Mr Swinney in any position to ask for protection Once he succeeded in getting the picture out of the country, the game would be won But Mr Swinney gave a kind of rueful snort He would have given much at the moment for an idea as to how that was to be accomplished

Augustus Swinney was a businessman with a strong sense of justice, and not an adventurer, even though his quixotic impulses and deep-seated hatred of his country's enemies sometimes landed

him in strange situations. Nevertheless he took natural precautions.

From a drawer he secured a small .32 automatic, tested its action, saw that it was loaded and a shell in the chamber, and slipped it into his pocket. He then wrote out a list of groceries and canned goods on a slip of paper and summoned Gabino.

'Vaya al bodega' The one on the corner of Vincente Lopez is open until ten. When you return, knock and call out. It will be locked.

From the window he watched the houseman emerge from the service entrance down the street. The three Nazis in the shadows did not budge, but one of the two uniformed policemen detached himself from his post on the other side of the street and strolled after him.

'Damn!' said Mr Swinney.

When an hour passed and the houseman had not returned, he knew. He reflected they would not hurt him. The servant had probably been arrested on some trumped-up pretext, thoroughly searched, and held.

Then it was to be a siege. Mr Swinney locked and bolted the rear service door, fastened the short chain to the front door leading to the lift and stairway, and inspected his larder. With careful rationing there was enough food – cereals and a few items of tinned goods – to last him for quite a while. He was glad to note a plentiful supply of coffee. He would need that to keep awake. He set about brewing himself a potful at once.

In the living-room Mr Swinney sipped the thick, strong drink, considered his situation and his chances, and tried to figure from whence the attack would come. The procession of polite diplomatic visitors he knew was over. The next parties to ring his doorbell would mean business. And if they came in force – well, even a dead American refrigeration engineer in a burgled apartment could be hushed up in a dictatorship.

Shortly before midnight Mr Swinney heard the humming of the automatic lift and the click and thump as it stopped at his floor. After a moment's pause the buzzer sounded.

'Polite of them!' he said to himself. 'Well, it's about time. As the Baron put it, I asked for it.'

He slipped the safety catch of the gun in his pocket and went to the door. 'Who is it?'

No reply. Mr Swinney wondered whether he was being a fool and whether the next move would not be a fusillade through the door. Nevertheless, leaving the short chain on, he opened the door to the width it permitted.

He smelled, not gunpowder, but the sweet, exciting fragrance of perfume, caught a glimpse of white skin and bronze hair and a drape of fur

'Amalie!' said Mr Swinney, and took the chain off the door

The Countess Amalie was framed magnificently by the doorway She wore an evening sheath of black satin without a single ornament to distract from the immediate form beneath it The fur drape of chinchilla made a background for the wide cat-eyes slanting into the high cheekbones

She said 'Am I terrible? If you misunderstand, I shall hate you to the day I die'

'My dear Countess,' said Mr Swinney, 'won't you come in?' He understood very well, and her presence thrilled him to the core He had met many women of the genre of the Countess Amalie in Europe and had invariably found the experience stimulating and enchanting They made practically no demands

He had recognised the type immediately the first time he had seen her The meeting in the salon of Señor de Paraná had confirmed it to him He had read the answer in the first glance they had exchanged In a masculine and quite unrefined manner, Mr Swinney had entertained great hopes for the development of a beautiful friendship with the Countess, Amalie Czernok Mr Swinney had not travelled extensively for nothing Then the somewhat florid events he had precipitated had quite driven thoughts of her out of his head

Misunderstand indeed! That was how the game began

She crossed the threshold and faced the steel and chrome mantel and the gilt-edged, burlap-wrapped object that reposed thereon. Her gaze never left it as Mr Swinney removed the downy, feather-light, exquisite fur from her shoulders

'That is why I had to come,' she said - 'to tell you what I felt For no other reason' The sensual mysteries of centuries lay behind her cat-smile

'I have thought of nothing else since it happened - your courage to do this thing for our people I thought that I had seen and known brave men I am European I have seen what our people have suffered and I have met courage, but until today I have never known the meaning of pure'

Mr Swinney's nerves were badly jangled by what he had been through He felt suddenly like a soldier who knows that on the morrow he returns to the firing line and, because time as well as desire is of the essence, is impatient of delay.

He faced her, put his hands to her shoulders, and said 'Amalie - for God's sake - stop talking.'

'Oh God,' said the Countess 'I can't help myself What is it you have done to me?'

Mr Swinney held her in his arms and sought for the key to the barrier that was between them, the resolution of the mood that made her suddenly shake with sobs

She said 'I do not know what has happened to me I cannot help myself And now I am afraid'

'Afraid?'

'For you, my dear - what will they do A moment ago what you had done seemed the bravest, noblest deed in the world And now -'

She escaped him and he let her go She went to the mantel and with her fingers touched the gilt frame, the burlap wrapping, then turned to him 'Oh, I hate it - I hate it,' she burst out It will come between us Can I help being a woman? There are too many of them - they are too strong What can one man do against them alone? Don't you understand? If they '

Mr Swinney went to her, but not precipitately, because he did not wish to frighten her further Not until she was in his arms again did he say 'My dear, what can we do - now?'

'Give it up We can't fight them alone. I could not bear to lose you - now'

Mr Swinney heaved a deep sigh 'Maybe I'm a fool, Amalie It was different until you came here Perhaps you are right'

'My dear - my dear'

There were no more barriers - so much so that at first Mr Swinney had some little difficulty in extricating himself Rage and cold distaste aided him The Countess was facing him, her cat-eyes as wide open and mouse-wary as they would go He took the feather-light chinchilla and dropped it around her shoulders

'All right,' said Mr Swinney 'Get out' He said 'Go back to the company you came from, the spying sluts of Stieber and Bismarck and all the rest of the master race, whose dirty work you do'

He said further 'Go back to the Middle Ages, where you belong You are old-fashioned, outmoded We are tired of you and we are tired of your Germans The whole world is tired to death of you all You smell of blood and money and the dead When we finish with this job, there will be no room left for you or any other of their filthy works'

The Countess Amalie, who could recognise a closed book when she saw one, went quietly, without a word, and with only a hint of genuine regret in her wide, violet eyes

Mr Swinney locked and chained the door and went out into the kitchen and heated himself some coffee It was while he was

drinking it that he remembered the look in her eyes. He said to himself 'Swinney, you're an idiot. Couldn't you have been so damned noble a little later?'

Then he set himself to the task of remaining awake. But there were no further incidents of any kind that night.

In the morning, while he was shaving, Mr Swinney reviewed the debit and credit sides of his performance, and for the first time since he had insulted him he thought of Chester Allen Buskirk, the stuffy little Old World gentleman and art critic, and his conscience hurt him a little.

The man was a product of a dead and bygone era. He had meant no harm, he had even been honest, according to his own lights. Mr Swinney wished there were some way in which he might convey to him that he regretted his behaviour towards him.

The idea of how this might be done came to him with such suddenness that he cut himself shaving, which was hardly worth the salvaging of social amenities with a man he would never see again. But Mr Swinney staunched the blood without regrets or rancour and went out to see that the time was after nine o'clock, which meant that his office would be available.

He picked up the telephone and dialled his office number. There was a clicking on the line, which told him no more than he expected. The phone was tapped. He didn't care, he got his secretary on the line and said, 'I may not be in for a while - might be a week. If anything turns up, you can reach me at home.'

Then he gave some business directions and concluded with 'Is Miguel there? Put him on.'

Miguel was the refrigerator foreman. When he came on the line, Swinney said, 'Hello, Miguel. Swinney speaking. Have we any of those special hams left? You know, the old ones?'

'I am not sure, señor. Shall I look?'

'I'll wait. Take a look. Try locker nine. There were some there last month.'

After a five-minute wait the foreman came back on the line. 'Sí, señor. I have found one.'

'Good. Do it up. Attach one of my cards. Miss Diega will give you one. Have her write on it. 'My compliments and apologies.' Right? Jump into your car and take it out to the airport and deliver it to Mr Chester Allen Buskirk. He is leaving on the eleven-o'clock plane. Let me know if he received it. That's all.'

Mr Swinney looked out of the window to see whether the new shift had come on yet. It had. Both the local police and the Nazi honour guard had been changed.

He thought what he would do if he were in the enemy's place,

and the logic of what must be their reasoning struck him as simple as the adding of two and two. They were prepared to wait him out. Mr Swinney's problem was equally simple. It was to stay awake. He wondered just how long a man could go without sleep and still function.

At one o'clock Miguel telephoned 'The señor received the ham, sir. He say thank you.'

'Now, that was nice of him,' Mr Swinney thought to himself.

The second night without sleep was bad, but the third was plain hell, and Mr Swinney did not know how he could go on.

He had thought to devise a way to steal cat-naps by setting his alarm clock to ring after a half-hour of sleep. But the second time he tried it, he woke up at the last faint tinkle of the bell to find the mechanism quite run down. Another moment and he would have slept on through.

Twice there had been action on both nights, once at the front door and once at the back. He had gone there and called through the door 'Skip it, boys.' He heard them departing, and the last time he heard them laughing.

Also, the second day his telephone was cut off. Mail and papers were no longer delivered. He lost track of time and dates, even though he marked the calendar, but his exhausted brain was playing him tricks. He learned all there was to know about the deadly and exquisite torture of sleeplessness, and several times he was on the verge of giving up.

Then he would down more coffee, prod himself, force himself to pace the apartment, show himself at the window. He would become confused and look at the calendar to see the time instead of his watch.

He had marked off the days - Tuesday, January 11 - Wednesday, January 12. Thursday, January 13, took on the terrible aspects of a mountain peak he might never achieve. They, on the other hand, were fresh and strong. If he fell asleep they would force the door. He fought on desperately.

On Thursday, January 13, Mr Augustus Swinney, having somehow survived the night, took an icy shower, shaved, put on clean linen and a fresh white suit, plucked a geranium from his window box and stuck it in his buttonhole, put on his Panama hat, and went out.

As he closed the front door of his apartment he did not so much as throw a glance at the thing still resting on the chrome mantel, where it had been ever since he had put it there so long, long ago.

The Baron von Schleuder answered his telephone 'He has gone out? Kurt is following him? He is breakfasting at the Continental? Yes! At once No - wait! I will come immediately'

Dr José Calderriega also answered an insistent ringing of his private line

'What? Left? At the Continental? An officer is still there? No one else has come or gone? No, no! Do not enter until I arrive'

They made quite a party in the foyer of No 17 Avenida Manuel Quintana, too many of them to crowd into the automatic elevator all at once, so Dr José Calderriega and Baron von Schleuder, eyeing each other warily, went up ahead, leaving the others to follow and taking only the police department expert with the skeleton keys

The keys, however, proved to be quite unnecessary, because, upon trying the handle of the outer apartment door, it proved to be unlocked

Outside of hundreds of cigarette stubs and some empty coffee cups the apartment was unchanged as the two men remembered it. There was even the burlap-wrapped affair on the mantel. Dr Calderriega, in spite of his age, was the first to reach it, but the Baron helped him unwrap the protective sacking and reveal the empty frame and the note in the middle of it, which was brief and to the point

Dear Dr Calderriega - or von Schleuder

Will you oblige me by returning this frame to Señor de Paraná or whoever owns it, as it does not belong either to me or to Mynheer van Schouven

The 'Old Woman of Haarlem' is now in New York City

I beg that you will believe me and refrain from ransacking my apartment. I shall be forced to present a bill for whatever damage is done to my premises

Very truly yours,

AUGUSTUS A SWINNEY

They did not believe him and tore the apartment to shreds, and later on Dr Calderriega paid a large bill without a murmur. But they did not find the *Old Woman of Haarlem*, for a very simple reason. Mr Swinney had told the truth.

In New York City, Mr Curtis Henry pounded on the door of the third-floor room of Jan van Schouven, shouting:

'Van Schouven! Van Schouven! Open at once! I must see you'

The little Dutchman emerged looking pale and worn and more child-like than ever.

Curtis Henry said 'Van Schouven! You must come at once.'

I—I am so excited I can hardly speak I have not yet got it straight It is about the *Old Woman of Haarlem* The ass Buskirk telephoned me He was in a state himself Something about a ham from South America and the Rembrandt painting He has just returned from Buenos Aires and discovered the canvas wrapped around a ham that was given him He is frightened to death of scandal, realises the picture was stolen from you, and insists you come at once If it is true—'

'If it is true,' said van Schouven, 'God is merciful in answering the prayers of those who love Him'

Off Avellaneda, a score or so of miles south of Buenos Aires on the Río de la Plata, the muddy brown waters of the river gurgled and stirred some two days later and finally healed the breach that had been made in its viscous surface by the disappearance of a steel conning tower

The U-boat commander was in a wretched temper for reasons beyond the discomfort of already cramped quarters, further narrowed by carefully wrapped and buttressed packages, packages that if divested of their straw and canvas coverings might reveal a carved Gothic eleventh-century saint, a Botticelli Madonna, or a Florentine chalice

The second-in-command looked in. 'At least we are going home, no? Cleared at 13 05'

The U-boat commander regarded his junior with distaste and delivered himself quietly of the German equivalent of 'That's a hell of a way to run a war.'

In Munich, Professor Kunstverwaltungsrat Bressar entered his littered office in the Pinakothek at nine o'clock in the morning in an irritable mood, which was not improved by the spectacle of his assistant, Herr Reinecke, standing at his desk pale and greasy and licking his lips

'Good morning, Reinecke'

'G-good morning, Herr Kunstverwaltungsrat'

'Na! What are you standing there like that for? What is the matter with you?'

'Herr Professor—a—a cable has come It is not good Buenos Aires has refused to permit the—shipment to land. It is being returned'

And in Buenos Aires, at the far other end of the hypotenuse of the triangle with Munich and New York, Mr Augustus A Swinney was having a cocktail

But this time he was having it all by himself in the fashionable Boston Bar in the Calle Florida

He was feeling considerably refreshed after sixteen hours of solid sleep. He was also further refreshed by a brief item in *La Prensa*. He had the paper folded to it and could not refrain from reading it over and over again.

It was a New York Associated Press dateline, headed 'Negotiations for Old Master,' and read 'Negotiations were completed today for the acquisition by the Metropolitan Museum of Art of Rembrandt's famous canvas, *Old Woman of Haarlem*, from its owner, Jan van Schouven, Dutch refugee and former wealthy tobacco merchant, for a price reputed to be between \$350,000 and \$400,000.'

Mr Swinney would have given much to see Buskirk's expression when he cut away the outer wrapping of his special ham and found himself looking into the wonderful, warm old face of the *Old Woman of Haarlem*.

Mr Swinney knew it had been sheer panic that had caused him to cut the portrait from the frame that evening when he had fled with the picture to his office, and wrap it around an old smoked ham to hide it. The idea had come to him when he had noticed how much the back of the canvas resembled the age and smoke-stained wrappings of these delicacies. Cellophane inside to protect the surface of the canvas, and a few 'Swift & Co, Buenos Aires, S A' packer's rubber stamps had completed the job.

But Mr Swinney would have been quite as willing to admit that the idea of palming it off on Chester Allen Buskirk and letting him take it to New York was nothing less than sheer inspiration.

Mr Swinney was conscious of a troublesome, stimulating perfume and the feeling that someone was looking over his shoulder. He turned and looked up into the cat-face of the Countess Amalie Czernok, who had just finished reading the A P item.

She tapped him gently on the shoulder and said 'You are a devil!'

Mr Swinney rose to his feet. He said 'Amalie! You ought to be pretty angry with me.'

'I—I am not sure that I am not.'

Mr Swinney had had much time to rest and think. He said 'As to a woman, I want to apologise to you for the things I said to you.'

The Countess reflected for a moment and her tongue showed for an instant, red like a kitten's at the gates of her teeth. She replied 'As a woman, there is no need to apologise. At no time did you say—that I was unattractive.'

She smiled her slow cat-smile and went on, but her look re-

mained with Mr Swinney for quite some time and kept his thoughts from dwelling too much and exclusively on the *Old Woman of Haarlem*. After all, *she* had been dead more than four hundred years, while Amalie was very much alive. He reflected that only a fool bore a grudge against a beautiful woman.

The Dowry

From my war diary, written in Rennes, France, August 18, 1944, after a day spent in Brittany with the Maquis, the men of the French Resistance

Every Maquis encampment was betrayed at some time or other by one of three things—loose talk, gipsies, or a woman. The Nazis paid from 5,000 to 20,000 francs for the betrayal of a patriot and found plenty of takers with dirty souls who would sell out a member of the FFI for money. The Maquis knew well enough who was betraying them, but as long as the Gestapo was in the saddle, there was little they could do about it. But now it is different, and all over Brittany sit the miserable, frightened, filthy women with the stain of greed and treachery on their souls awaiting their trial, and the certain ponarding that will follow. As one of the Maquis had inscribed on his Sten gun, 'Victoire et Revanche'

There is a horrid story of a woman who married a villager, and gave a wedding breakfast. This wedding breakfast is a big event in Brittany. She invited a patriot member of the underground to attend and then betrayed him to the Gestapo, who surrounded the house during the wedding feast, took him away, tortured and killed him. That is how the woman got her marriage portion. Note. A good short story here. Think about it!

I thought about it a great deal, because I couldn't forget it, or any part of that day of August 18 when Sonia Tomara of the 'Herald Tribune,' Rozelle Hargrove of NEA, herself a born Breton, and private Johnny Anderson of Milwaukee, our jeep-driver, and myself drove from Rennes to Saint-Brieuc, Pontrieux, and Paimpol in northern Brittany, part of which was still in the hands of the Germans, to find the leader of the Maquis and visit the secret camp of these courageous guerrilla bush fighters. The story was written upon my return to the United States and published in Cosmo under the title, THE DOWRY.

We four were the first Americans to enter the little Breton

seaside village of Paimpol, a few hours after the patriots had captured the town and taken the German garrison prisoner. Later that day we were taken to the secret camp of the Maquis, and there it was that we heard the story of Yolande from the lips of a young captain of the underground who had known her and who but a short time before had had a bitter share in her final destiny.

The tragedy was still fresh in the minds of all, for they had known her since she was a little girl in and around Paimpol. We saw the house in which she had lived and where she sold out the patriot for thirty pieces of silver, and on the execution ground, a small field next to the camp, we stood on the new-packed earth beneath which she slept. The men of the F.F.I. had not waited long to exact justice. The watchword of the Bretons, always a tough and primitive people, was 'Pas de pitié'.

I remember the first time I heard the phrase, on the way to Paimpol, when we stopped by the bank of a canal and watched them fish the dead body of a German sergeant out of the water. He had been executed for shocking and nameless brutalities the night before. As the battered corpse was laid on the stone landing at the edge of the canal, children were shouting and laughing and the villagers looked down upon the remains with great interest and enthusiasm.

Evidently someone in the crowd must have said something that contained a modicum of sympathy, a passing word for something that had once been a human being, even though he had not lived like one. There was an old peasant on our side of the water in cap and jacket, with snow-white hair, whose ears it reached. He removed his long pipe from his mouth and shouted across the canal 'Pas de pitié'. His old voice rang over the water like the bells of doom. It was the voice of all tortured France speaking. This was the hour of revenge.

Yet there had been some pity for Yolande, and that was why I knew I wanted to write her story, because through it I might be able to project something of the France that I saw at the moment of her liberation.

While the essentials of the story, the events and the background, are true, the details of the story, the relationships of the characters and their intimacies, are fiction. I haven't the faintest idea what the readers of 'Cosmopolitan' thought of THE DOWRY because not one of them wrote to tell me.

It was in the Summer of 1944 that my long-standing ambition to become a war correspondent was fulfilled when 'Cosmopolitan' sent me across as correspondent and European editor on the

finest assignment for which any writing man could ask, and for this I will owe a lifelong debt to Miss Frances Whiting, then editor-in-chief, who made it possible

For it was more than an assignment. There was a bit of soul-saving involved. Miss Whiting was both editor and friend. And as an editor she knew that I was going to pieces as a writer because, owing to circumstances, I had been unable to get to the war. As a friend she saw that this was profoundly affecting me and might have permanent consequences. I was brooding over missing out on the greatest story of all, and my state of mind was reflected in my work.

*As it had twice before, Cosmo underwrote my trip overseas. My only instructions were 'Go over and look at the war. When you come back, write about it if and when you feel like it. We won't press you.' I went to England and France, into Paris with Dick Tregaskis in a jeep among Leclerc's tanks the day of liberation, smelled powder, got scared, got shot at, and came home with my gloom and megrims dispelled and a sackful of material, which before the war ended yielded three articles, three short stories, and a three-part serial. Two of these short stories, *THE DOWRY* and *VERNA* have been included in this book.*

With them go my gratitude and affection for Miss Whiting, who helped me around many a rough corner in my career in the past and who by this final assignment did more for me than any other person or persons in the entire editorial and publishing field. And I do not know which is more grateful, the writer or the man. Both of us salute her.

THE DOWRY

Inland from the savage granite coast of northern Brittany the country softens to peaceful rolling farmlands, roads winding through brier rose and hawthorn hedges behind which lie, half concealed, the stone cottages and stout barns of the thrifty Breton peasants, sweet lands bathed in sunshine or veiled by the grey curtains of mizzling rain that drift in from the sea, a country whose outward appearance belies the fierce, primitive, untamed nature of its inhabitants.

It is a land of giant spreading oaks, of orchards of apple, pear,

and plum, coloured with the red and purple fuchsia and flaming laurel, scented with the blossoms of mimosa, eucalyptus, and camellia. It is also a land of high romance and dark superstition, of sorceries, banshees and torrigans, and memories of ancient pagan religions whose monoliths, the druid menhirs rise like solitary giants from meadows of purple heather, and the dolmens, and mystic circles of moss-greened, granite cromlech stones stand half-hidden in fields of gleaming gorse and tangled brier.

Some twelve miles in from the sea sleeps the old market town of Tregoulac in the Department of Côtes-du-Nord, a village of tall, archaic timbered houses that lean forward until they appear almost to meet across the narrow cobbled streets, houses topped with crazily peaked towers, gables, dormers, and chimney-pots, tossing to the sky like sails and pennons flying from ships of stone.

Tregoulac is thirteen centuries old, but ancient though it be, it is yet young compared to the antiquity of the bloodstreams that course through the veins of the Bretons of the district, descendants of Celt and Briton and Saxon conqueror, Roman and Gaul.

Modern times and improvements have dimmed the old customs. Life centres in the market square and the church and cemetery of St Gildas at one end, the starched white coifs and full-blown black skirts and coloured kirtles are seen only on the figures of the very old women who still bring their curved earthen pitchers to the fountain of the Virgin set in the mossy churchyard wall, and pause there to kneel and pray for a moment for the living and the dead.

The Christian religion, overlaid upon the deep-rooted and still untamed paganism inherited from their ancestors, plays a tremendous part in the daily life of the people. The Bretons live in close association with death, their friend, the 'Ankou,' whose ghostly horse and cart are heard by the peasants, padding and creaking down the hedged lanes in the dark of night on his tireless rounds. They have a Christian version of an old saying of the druids 'The dead are so many, the living so few,' and they have no fear of death. For the Breton to die is simply to emigrate.

The war in the spring of 1943 had neither changed nor much disturbed the town or the inhabitants of Tregoulac and the surrounding farms. The Germans had occupied but by no means conquered the country and its people.

The Nazi garrison in field-grey occasionally tramped the narrow, cobbled streets and sometimes tan and green military cars roared into the market square to discharge groups of grim S.S. men in their black and silver uniforms with the death's-head at their peaked caps. The townsfolk simply ignored them.

Perhaps, with their departure, a citizen of Tregoulac would be missing thereafter from his usual haunts, never to return. And nothing would ever be said, or even whispered.

Or a glaring black and white poster printed in French and Breton, would appear on the dark wall of the churchyard or the smooth sides of the Hôtel de Ville, the town hall on the market square.

REWARD! 20,000 FRANCS WILL BE PAID FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO THE ARREST OF THE TRAITOR AND ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE KNOWN AS 'PANTHÈRE,' SUSPECTED LEADER OF THE UNDERGROUND

[SIGNED] COL. HEINZ VON BRAUNHELM,
DEUTSCHE KOMMANDATUR

Then the townspeople would pause in little knots before the proclamation to read, silent and tight-lipped, even their dark eyes veiled and quickly downcast as they walked away. If they were those who knew something of the whereabouts or identity of the mysterious Panthère, the information remained locked in the iron cavity of their hearts. For the Breton is above all fiercely loyal and an implacable enemy.

It was as though the Germans felt and feared the deep, mysterious nature of the people and their unchallengeable connection with the dark and stormy past of this haunted corner of France, for they left them strictly alone except for the occasional desperate man-hunts aimed at controlling and destroying the slowly growing underground and resistance movement.

Thus life and business went on as usual in Tregoulac under the German occupation. That spring the town was far more concerned with the progress, or rather lack of progress, of the match between Yolande Plouhet, daughter of Jean and Marie Plouhet, proprietors of the little butter-and-egg shop behind the church on the rue Saint-Eloi, and Louis Guizenec, who owned a small but prosperous farm and apple orchard a kilometre or so from the village.

All Tregoulac knew that dark-eyed Yolande Plouhet was madly in love with Louis Guizenec, had been for more than a year, that he favoured her, but that the matter of the dowry stood between him and the consummation of her heart's desire. For the parents of Yolande were far from wealthy, and the handsome, blue-eyed, fair-haired farmer was known to be exceedingly thrifty and beset with ambition. He had his eye on the plot of fertile land adjoining his farm.

It had grown to be a kind of standing jest in and around Tregoulac, and natives who left the vicinity on business trips or

to visit relatives would inquire upon their return 'Well, has Farmer Louis given way yet on the matter of the dowry and married Yolande Plouhet?' Or 'What is the news? Has Yolande Plouhet managed to raise the cash yet to wed Louis Guizenec?'

But it was no joke to Yolande, who was dying of love for Louis. She was torn between her ardent desire for him and submission to the custom of the country, which acquiesces in the right of a prospective groom to demand that his bride bring him a sufficient dowry to help him rise in the world and thus secure the happiness of the forthcoming marriage.

Yolande, to all appearances, was a modern girl living in a modern age. Like the other youth of Tregoulac, she had abandoned the starched coif of the district, the colourful peasant garb, and wooden sabots. She wore skirt and blouse imported from Rennes, a city she had visited several times as a child in the company of her godfather, a well-to-do tanner of Tregoulac.

She clacked over the cobblestones in high heels, and was no stranger to the ministrations of the hairdressing parlour and beauty shop at the corner of the market square. She was handsome, with dark, brooding eyes and full Oriental mouth, the lower lip protruding slightly. On Sundays she never failed to attend Mass at the Church of St Gildas, with her parents, a small, brown figure sitting with head bent in piety, hands folded, eyes lowered, except when guardedly and with infinite caution they strayed to the side to catch a glimpse of the sturdy figure and sand-blond head of Farmer Louis.

But beneath her simple, unobtrusive exterior Yolande was a Breton of the Bretons, a smouldering mixture of passion, desire, mystery, and superstition. She was as primitive as her ancient ancestors, the Celts, the squat, dark Oriental race that had come flooding westward through the Carpathian passes in the age of the birth of Europe.

She lived in a world peopled by creatures of old legends, ghosts and sorcerers and pagan gods. She prayed dutifully to all the accredited saints in the calendar, but stepped softly in the presence of the great druid oak at the cross-roads outside Tregoulac, and old memories in her venerated the menhir stone on the northern edge of the town, now topped by the Christian cross, its smooth surface carved in modern times with the symbols of Christ.

When first her dark eyes, shining from their square-cut lids, had rested upon the figure of Farmer Louis, one market day, she knew that she loved him, she had gone to the church and lit a candle to St Anne and prayed that Louis would be made to look

upon her with favour. But that night, too, she had stolen out into the fields in the moonlight, lacing sprigs of mystic vervain into her hair. She had repaired to the dolmen of *Ma Douez* and had performed those ancient rites which were requisite.

And, indeed, the gods, both new and old, had rewarded her prayers, for Louis returned her affection, if not her love, though not to the degree of becoming either dizzy or careless in the matter of the dowry.

Louis Guizenec was a sturdy peasant, close-mouthed and uncommunicative, a little slow-witted, but a man who knew his worth. He was a Saxon strain, which accounted for his fair hair, blue eyes, and tall frame. He lived for his farm and his acres, and was not averse to a marriage that would increase the number of the latter and the prosperity of the former. On the other hand, he was not the kind of man to throw himself away for a pretty face or a neat ankle. A dowry of twenty thousand francs would enable him to purchase the desirable property adjoining his. If the girl who provided it were comely, so much the better, but if not he was no man to complain either. The important thing was to get ahead in the world.

Like so many of the inhabitants of the district, he had traffic neither with the Germans nor with the resistance movement. He was a man who minded his work and his own business, brought his produce to market and sold it for the best price it would bring. All he asked was to be let alone to till his acres and nurse his orchard, and this the Germans were constrained to do. Life under the occupation had not altered for him except for the understanding he had reached with Yolande.

And as for that, he was a patient man and could afford to wait. For the dowry he demanded was far beyond the means of either Yolande or her parents. But it flattered his vanity that the girl was so much in love with him, and when in a night of courting in the churchyard cemetery of St Guldaz, where the couples of Tregoulac came to plight their troth as their elders had done before them, she had promised him with tears in her eyes – nay, sworn by the sacred bones of her grandfather – that she would secure the sum if he would but give her time, he had agreed. After all, he was no worse off than he had been before, and certainly the dark-eyed girl attracted him strongly.

And so, beneath the calm demure demeanour exhibited as she waited behind the counter of the butter-and-egg shop, Yolande burned with desire for Louis as her husband and suffered and planned how she might come by the money and tortured herself with her love.

She was swept between admiration for Louis's thrift and his keen business sense in holding out for the sum he demanded, and poignant, wishful dreams of a Louis who would take her in his arms and whisper that for love of her he would waive the dowry. Then these sweet fantasies would be replaced by fear and anguish and gave rise in her head to ever wilder schemes to secure the sum.

Ah, the war, the times, and the occupation. Before, a girl might journey to Paris and take employment. There were many ways of making money in Paris. Now she could not even journey to Rennes.

Yolande had paid a painful visit to her godfather, Yves Gourin, the wealthy tanner, on one of his infrequent appearances in Tregodiac, for since the occupation his business had appeared to flourish and he was absent on long trips more and more. At least, Yolande had always considered Yves wealthy, but when she told her story and, trembling, made her plea to the old man for the money, he had shaken his silvery head sadly.

'It is not possible, my daughter. It is a large sum that Louis places upon his—ah—desirability. A more modest man might make a better husband. Such a sum, if it were available, might be better spent in these times.'

Yolande was to remember this remark later. But now she was only stricken with a sense of hopelessness and despair. She burst into tears.

'But, Godfather, I love him. What shall I do?'

Her question was a memory of her childhood and better days. When as a little girl she had come to her godfather with some childish trouble, she had been wont to turn up her little round face to him and with quivering lips ask: 'But, Godfather, what shall I do?'

Invariably the answer had been a gentle smile and the words: 'Pray, my daughter, have faith in God and pray!'

And it was thus he answered her now: 'Pray, my daughter, and perhaps a way will be found. Do not let your desires blind your faith in the good God.'

Not her tears, but anger now blinded Yolande.

Pray . . . pray . . . always pray. Had she not exhausted the pantheon of deities, pagan as well as Christian, with her nightly supplications? And the aching pain of love for Louis that was ever present in her heart was suddenly replaced by hatred for the gentle old man with the sharp, keen face and white hair down to the shoulders of his embroidered jacket. He had the money. She knew it. He could give it to her if he wanted. It was easier

to say 'Pray' than to part with the sum that would have bought her eternal happiness

But no sign of her emotions appeared upon her face beyond the tears that still welled from her eyes, tears of desperation and helpless fury, and even these she dried now and took her leave

She walked through the narrow winding street from the home of her godfather and passed through the market place on her way back to her father's shop. She paused before the poster affixed to the front of the leaning façade of the Hôtel de Ville and read it again

REWARD! 20,000 FRANCS WILL BE PAID FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO THE ARREST OF THE TRAITOR AND ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE, KNOWN AS 'PANTHÈRE,' SUSPECTED LEADER OF THE UNDERGROUND

COL. HEINZ VON BRAUNHELM,
DEUTSCHE KOMMANDATUR

The sun was warm and the air soft, but she seemed to grow cold as though the winter mists had begun to blow in from the sea. Twenty thousand francs! The four eyes of the zeros seemed to stare stonily into her heart and she stared back like one possessed. Twenty thousand francs! The sum of the dowry, if one but knew who and where this Panthère might be. Traitor and enemy of the people, the poster said. If one could but be so fortunate as to have such information within one's grasp! Her mind leaped straight to a vision—her wedding party and Louis at her side—Louis for ever at her side. The vision dizzied her and she swayed with its delight. It was still with her, wreathing the corners of her mouth in a smile, as she entered the shop.

It was not until late that night alone in her bed above the little garden that opened out behind their house that the thought came to her that whoever this mysterious Panthère might be who was so badly wanted by the Germans, he was a Breton, and a Frenchman, and to betray him would be the blackest crime of which the human soul was capable.

And then she was ashamed and frightened, and cowered in her bed and wondered whether God, *le bon Dieu* who dwelt high in the spire of the Church of St Gildas on the market place, had been watching and had looked into her heart as she had stood before the poster in the square.

Time passed. The poster remained on the walls unheeded. Yolande busied herself with concocting one frantic scheme after another for raising the twenty thousand francs. Then one day, by

a sheer accident of fate, she came into possession of a terrible piece of information Panthère, the mysterious and unknown leader of the resistance movement in the Tregoulac district, was none other than Yves Gourm, her godfather. There could be no doubt of it, nor of the redoubled efforts the Germans were making to break his identity and find him. A munitions convoy on the coast road had been ambushed and blown up. Tregoulac itself was again filled with S S men, and Gestapo agents were everywhere, spying and interrogating. The inhabitants remained tight-lipped, wary-eyed, and unmoved. The flurry would pass. It always had.

And Yolande, grown quieter, paler, more lovesick than ever, carried the dreadful secret locked away in her breast, whence it rose to torture her night and day.

If only she had not stumbled upon it. Sometimes she tried to convince herself that it was not true, that it was only a bit of local gossip. But then there was corroborating evidence – Yves's unusually long and repeated absences from Tregoulac, ostensibly on business. And then she remembered the remark he had made to her about the money. 'Such a sum, if it were available, might be better spent in these times.'

She knew now what he was doing with his money. And an echo of the anger that had flamed in her heart the day he had denied her flickered up. 'Resistance movement indeed! One was no worse off under the Germans than one had been before, and besides it was obvious that they had come to stay. Twenty thousand francs for a lost and futile cause. Twenty thousand francs for her happiness. And what if Yves Gourm were to die? He was an old man.'

Yolande struggled like a linnet trapped in lime against the evil and treacherous thoughts that crept into her head. Time and again she barred and doubled-bolted the doors to her mind, sealed them with fervent prayers to the saints to protect her, and still they gained entrance. If only Panthère had been someone unknown to her. If only she had never found out. She evoked memories out of her childhood relationship with Yves, his kindnesses and many little beneficences to her, the presents he had bought for her on the great fête days of the *Pardon*, the dress for her first Communion, and the wonderful trips to Rennes.

She went to church more often to ask to be cleansed of all thoughts of evil. But she did not make confession. And she avoided the mystic pagan monuments in the neighbourhood. True, they were only old and innocent stones and monoliths of granite, some of them with cup marks, hollows to be anointed

with honey, wax, or oil, but the Church had interdicted such sacrifice and the stones themselves, had banished them into pagan darkness, and in that darkness dwelt memories of cults and practices, love of the body of man that transcended all else, love of love

And yet, for all the torture through which she was going, Yolande knew that never, never would she eternally damn her soul with such a foul betrayal of one who was not only a patriot and a brave man, but a second father to her

But that was before the talk began to go around Tregoulac about Louis and Henriette Jerzual, the dumpy, snub-nosed daughter of Hervé Jerzual, the prosperous owner of the principal hotel on the market square

It was the kind of talk that suddenly springs up in a village here and there, casual gossip. It was that Henriette had been making eyes at Louis in the tavern room of the hotel, and her father possessed and was willing to pay the sum of twenty thousand francs' dowry in order to secure his not too attractive daughter a good marriage. And the farmer who owned the plot of ground adjoining Louis's farm was anxious to sell and had put a price on it, take it or leave it.

The talk stabbed to the heart of Yolande like a poniard.

It was just gossip. Even Louis denied it fervently to Yolande when she taxed him with it, and swore it was not so. And she would be reassured for the moment, but any instant her reassurance would be demolished like a house of cards by a word or a glance or even something imagined. But one kept on hearing things—Louis and Farmer Bodeur, who owned the plot of ground, were seen in long discussion. Louis was spending more time than necessary in the taproom of the hotel, where Henriette served the tall pitchers of cider and rich slices of local salmon. Who could blame Louis? After all, a man had to think of his future and could not wait for ever. And besides, though she was far from a beauty, Henriette was a hard, willing worker and would make Louis a good wife. Too bad about the little Plouhet.

Yolande, filled with the demons of jealousy and fear, went through agonies that were well-nigh unbearable. Where there was smoke, there must be fire, and the thought of losing Louis to another suffocated her until she thought she would die.

She could not sleep at night and would lie in her bed thinking of Louis, the look of him and the smell of him, the feel of him, the way his blue eyes shone from his brown face, the hard roundness of his thighs, tight in his work breeches, the strong jut of his jaws clutched around a pipe-stem, and the odour of fields and

leather harness, of horses and of man that enveloped her when he held her in his arms

And from out the dark pits of hell the demons of jealousy brought forth a picture of Louis and ugly Henriette together in their marriage bed and held it before Yolande until she writhed and screamed in the darkness and shut her eyes and hid, sobbing and crying, under the covers, calling his name and the name of the saints, and names of druid gods and sorcerers, too, long forbidden, but never forgotten

Now she could no longer banish the dreadful temptation to sacrifice Yves He was so old What was death but a translation, an emigration to paradise? What was the passage of one who had lived out his time to the necessity of assuaging the fires that were consuming her? An old man would vanish from the scene as so many had before him, and a young, strong-beloved body would be delivered to her arms, hers for eternity

And who would ever need to know, or suspect, if one were clever – if one told Louis one thing and her parents another, if one laid one's plans so carefully that there could be no slip, if one made certain the bird would not be flown when the trap was sprung?

The marriage of Yolande Plouhet and Louis Guizenec took place in the early summer of 1943, and the guests assembled in the gay little garden behind the cottage of Jean and Marie Plouhet, after the ceremony at St Gildas, for the traditional Breton wedding breakfast

In her little room, overlooking the garden, where she was changing her clothes after the church ceremony and donning the traditional Breton costume of wide flowing black skirt heavily banded with velvet and embroidery, with beautifully worked over-apron of coloured satin, Yolande was swept alternately between delirious joy and waves of fear

Louis was hers, but yet she skated on the brink of disaster The twenty thousand francs in crisp pink and green banknotes reposed in her wedding chest atop the heaps of snowy linens and clothes that would supply her new household Louis had seen it there and accepted her promise that he would receive it after the wedding Her parents she had told that Louis had finally agreed to waive the large sum he had previously demanded and accept the more modest dowry that she herself had amassed

She dressed herself mechanically, hardly knowing what she did, except that consciously she slowed the process, lingering over each movement, and always her eyes would come to rest upon

the heavily carved lid of the oaken chest beneath which the money burned. It was not yet hers to bestow. If she failed, she would have to return it. And sometimes when she paused stock-still and found herself staring at the chest, she was seeing the square harsh face of a man bearing a white sword-scar and surmounted by a black military cap to which was affixed a death's-head in silver. She would remember what she had said and what she had promised. Then waves of sickening apprehension would flow over her until her legs trembled so she felt she would sink to the floor.

There came a knock at the door. Yolande's hands flew to her breast to stifle the wild beating of her heart. It was Annique, her best friend and bridesmaid, who said: 'Yolande, are you coming? Everyone is waiting. Your godfather, Yves Gourin, has just arrived, and . . .'

Yolande said slowly: 'Yves has come?'

'Oh yes, and *Monsieur le Maire* and all the guests are assembled.'

Yolande took her friend by the shoulders, and turned her around, pushing her towards the door: 'Go. I am almost ready. I will be down in a moment.'

When she was alone, she staggered, her knees collapsing under her, and fell across the carved chest, weeping tears of relief. She had received a message from him promising to return to Tregoulac in time for her wedding. When she had noted his absence at the ceremony in the chapel at St Gildas, she had had such a seizure of fear and terror that she had hardly been able to give voice to the responses that joined her through all eternity to Louis Guizenec. But now Yves was really there.

She pulled herself together and swiftly repaired the ravages made by the tears. She fastened the fine coil of lace and linen that had been her mother's and her grandmother's before her, and through it she twined a sprig of orange blossom. When she was quite ready, she went to the window looking out upon the rue Saint-Eloi and stood there for a moment, passing her handkerchief once across her brow as though she were faint. Then she turned and proceeded slowly down the stairs and stood framed in the doorway that opened on the scene of gaiety and festivity in the little garden.

There was much to meet her eyes, the long trencher tables laden with the wedding breakfast, round, dark loaves of bread and pitchers of wine and cider, plates of meat and vegetables, the huge *pot-au-feu*, gleaming pink and silver salmon, dishes of sweets and cakes, the two blind *bimou*-players seated with their

ancient bagpipes on a raised platform, the ribbons and wreaths and decorations, the milling guests, the imposing figure of the Mayor in his frock coat of office. She saw none of these.

Her gaze rested only on the person of Yves Gourin, whose tall figure and shining white hair falling to his shoulders caught the eye. He was pulling at a long pipe, smiling, his fine face gleaming with pride.

And then thereafter Yolande's eyes sought out and found and remained upon the figure of her husband, who stood at the far end of the garden surrounded by crones, a cider cup in his hand. She dwelt upon every feature, the aquiline bridge of his nose, the fair hair at his neck, the slope of his shoulders, the firm pillars of his legs, doting upon them, devouring them with love and swelling passion.

There was first a shout as the guests greeted the bride, and then an old, old woman of the village, Mère Locmariac, came forward and, kneeling at the feet of the lovely bride, in the old tradition, offered up a prayer for the dead, the dead of the families and all of those assembled there, whose presence and blessing she invoked.

And Yolande Guizenec listened to the invocation of the dead and feasted her eyes upon her husband.

Mère Locmariac finished her prayer. She rose and kissed the bride on both her smooth cheeks and the first shrill wailing of the *binious* arose from the platform of the blind pipers, in a haunting melody that filled the garden, drowning out the rustle and murmur of the guests at the beauty and the paleness of the bride, and drowning other sounds too, the roar of cars in the street without, and the tramping of heavy-shod feet on the cobblestones.

Now that the ceremony to the dead was over, the tune of the pipes shifted to a gay and liting dance, the traditional *jabadao*, and the guests rustled and shifted and murmured, looking to see who should be the first to have the honour of dancing with the bride.

Yolande Guizenec went straight to her godfather, Yves Gourin, laid aside her bridal bouquet, and made him a curtsy. Then, to the applause of the assembled guests, the old man laid down his pipe, bowed, took his godchild by the hand, and together they began the ancient and stately round of the *jabadao*.

And this was the way the black-uniformed German *Schutz-Staffel* troops surrounding the house found them when they came streaming in through the door, flooding over the stone garden wall, filling and blocking every exit.

In the first shock, no one moved except the soldiers of death taking up their positions commanding the garden, and in a moment they, too, froze into immovable figures of silent menace. The wedding guests stood like statues, some of them with cups half raised to their lips, or their hands at the plates of refreshments on the tables. None looked at his neighbour. The blind *binou*-players, sensing the catastrophe through their skins, left off playing, and the last wind from the collapsed bags of their pipes came as a kind of low, dying moan. In the centre of the garden stood Yolande and Yves Gourin, petrified, she with an arm about his waist. There came the smart tramp of heavy boots in the corridor of the cottage and the metallic snick and click of the cocking of weapons. A German strode into the garden, an officer with a harsh face crossed by a long, white scar. At the peak of his black cap was a silver death's-head. He paused for an instant to survey the scene from the threshold. Then he marched straight to the old man with the long white hair standing next the bride and spoke sharply:

'Yves Gourin, you are under arrest!'

The awful moment was broken by the cry of Yolande, who reached up and threw her arms about her godfather's neck. 'Oh no, no!'

Still no one moved. No one even dared to look. Only Yolande saw the expression on the face of her godfather, the queer glitter that came into his eyes, which turned into a look of unutterable loathing and contempt. Then, slowly, he reached up and unfastened her arms from about his neck with a kind of shudder as though he were touching something reptilian and put them away from him. Without a word, he turned and followed the officer from the garden. A few moments later the gay, festive little enclosure was as empty of soldiers as it had been before. Outside one heard motors starting up with loud explosions and finally fading away in the distance.

Then only did the people in the garden return to life, stirring, speaking softly, shifting, forming into little knots, while Yolande ran to Louis and threw herself sobbing on his breast. The drone of the *binous* resumed again, but it was a Breton lament rather than a dance tune. Afterwards they played merrily again, though not for long, for the spirit was out of the celebration and none was in a mood for dancing. When the food and drink had been consumed, the wedding guests went home.

Later in the day a cart drew up in front of the little shop in the rue Saint-Eloi, and Yolande and her earthly possessions, her pots and pans, her bedding and clothes and linens in the carved

wedding chest, and her twenty thousand francs, were transported to the home of her husband

Yves Gourin was never seen alive again, and the Germans saw to it that the town heard about what had been done to him before he died. But the town also knew and whispered about the fact that he had passed with his lips sealed and that the Germans had been unable to wring from him the names of his accomplices in the underground.

And there were other things that began to be whispered and gossiped and traded in and about Tregoulac, things spoken softly across the wooden tables at the tavern, after cautious looks about, brief sentences exchanged on corners beneath the leaning, pot-bellied houses, dreadful things spoken across the stone and blackberry brier fences of the quiet farmlands.

Who was it that had betrayed Yves Gourin to the Germans? Ah well, never repeat it, but one hears. The price that farmer Guizenec paid for his new plot of land was exactly twenty thousand francs, was it not? Remember the amount of the reward on the poster, which has now been removed? Whence had one in such modest circumstances as Yolande Plouhet procured such a sum for her dowry? Why did she appear in her wedding dress at the second-storey window fronting on the rue Saint-Eloi before joining the guests in the garden? Jean Pelicot, the postman, swears he saw her signal with her handkerchief, and a few moments later the street was full of Germans. Ah, and most damning, did she not single out Yves to be the first to dance with her at the wedding? And was she not hanging on his arm when the Germans surrounded the house and burst in upon them? Such a black deed could hardly be possible. And yet, when one puts two and two together

Time went on and the talk and the whispers grew, though they did not reach the ears of Louis Guizenec, who was concerned only with the expansion of his farm, but Yolande heard them, or rather felt them. At first she was afraid, but later she rallied. What if they suspected? There was no proof. No one, nothing could disturb her happiness with Louis.

But things were happening beneath the surface of the little town, mysterious boilings and seethings. More and more of the young men of Tregoulac and the district were vanishing into the bush. One heard of the growing strength of the F F I., the French Forces of the Interior, the Maquisards and their secret camps, an underground army growing day by day, mysterious parachutings from aeroplanes that flew over in the night, growing caches of weapons and ammunition, growing boldness on the part of the men

of the Maquis. The Gestapo officer of the district himself was said to have been ambushed and captured by the FFI, and the Nazi garrison in Tregoulac was doubled.

And now when Yolande came to town alone, there were those who would not speak to her any longer, but stared at her stonily, or turned and walked away when she approached, and into their looks she read an implacable hatred.

Her mood changed to one of defiance. Very well, then, they knew. And what if they did? They dared not do anything to her. The Germans were there to protect her. They would always protect her.

And then in the late winter there was talk in Tiegoulac of a coming Allied invasion of France.

To Yolande it was just talk. And if it happened, she had no doubt that it would be defeated. The Germans were so strong. There were so many of them. The coast defences were impregnable. The Allies would be swept back into the sea, the Maquisards captured and crushed. And in the meantime, the moment of now, through the very ticking of the clock, she had her Louis.

But in the early springtime, when May brought the rose-pink pear and the snowy apple blossoms to bloom, she felt a vague uneasiness, a tightening of the nerves, the kind of heaviness one feels on a stifling summer's day when all nature stills, the storm clouds gather on the horizon, and one leans one's ear to catch the first faint, distant rumbling.

Not even when the armies of liberation landed in Normandy, though, did she give way to fear. She took courage from the long lines of German tanks and cannon and lorries laden with stout troops in field-grey that rumbled through the town. None could defeat this dreadful might. It was impossible that the swelling combers of war could break over this Army and threaten the happiness of her possession of Louis.

June turned to July. One heard more and more disquieting things—break-through at Saint-Lô, a German army fleeing, another cut off. And then all of one night Yolande lay awake and shivering beside the warm, sleeping body of her husband and listened to the distant thudding of the cannon at Saint-Malo carried to her through the quiet of the starry summer night.

She tried to comfort herself that it was a far-off thunderstorm, but she knew that it was not, for it never ceased, or changed, and every so often she heard a dish rattle or stir in her china cupboard, and sometimes there would be a heavy thump of air upon a window casement as from a distant explosion. And she lay there all

through the night cold as ice and not daring to creep to the warmth of Louis

It was a few days later that Yolande brought the week's yield of butter, milk, and eggs to market in Tregoulac to find the town alive and boiling with military traffic, staff cars, weapon-carriers, road buses, lorries. The Germans were loading them with every evidence of haste, carrying boxes and crates and caissons of munitions out of houses and headquarters. It was then that Yolande noticed for the first time that all of the vehicles were pointed, not west, towards the front, but eastwards, the line of retreat. Already the first of the trucks and carriers were beginning to roar and rumble out of town.

An icy chill seized her heart as she watched. And now as she reached the market square with her horse and cart, a rattle of small-arms fire broke out from the north-west part of the town, backed by the rhythmic cha-cha-cha-cha of machine-gun fire. She heard a German soldier say the word 'Maquis!' and then the speed of activity in the square redoubled. Trucks started away with only half a load.

Yolande screamed once, loud and long, but no one paid any attention to her. A Reichswehr soldier carried a duffel bag out of a house and dumped it into a small open military car. Yolande ran to him and shouted. 'What is happening? Where are you going?' She tugged at his arm, her hair flying, her face all white and twisted.

The soldier looked at her in surprise, shook her loose, and climbed into the car. He said 'Back to Germany - I hope - before your damned Maquis catch us.'

Yolande clutched blindly at the side of the car as though by holding it she could halt the entire exodus. 'But you can't! You can't leave me! You can't go!'

The soldier sniggered and said 'Too bad we discovered each other so late, Fraulein! Well, *au revoir!*' and he clashed the steel car into gear and jerked it away from Yolande and off through the market square, leaving her sprawling on her hands and knees on the cobblestones. Somebody near by laughed loudly. And from the upper window of a house across the square, the tricolour of France suddenly cascaded in folds of red, white, and blue and hung there mockingly in the brilliant sunshine.

It was two days later, looking out on the farm from the window of her kitchen, that Yolande saw them coming carefully in single file across the fields, towards the house.

There were six of them, men and boys, ragged and whiskered like pirates from their long stay in the bush, clattering with

CONFESSIONS OF A STORY-TELLER

haggling for guineas, shillings, and pence was considered far beneath his dignity

Today the agent does our haggling for us and protects our tender sensibilities from contact with the vulgar commercial aspects of the business that might have a tendency to stifle the beauty in our souls. He sets the prices, wangles us raises, cushions the shock of rejections, sends out clean copies when the old ones get frayed from too much editorial thumbing, listens to our complaints and gripes, sympathises when editors fail to agree with us on the epic qualities of a story, lends us money when we are broke, gives matrimonial advice, makes appointments with editors, listens to offers that come in and screens out the clucks, crackpots, and cheapjacks, supervises contracts, gets the income tax made out, takes the blame and acts as the fall guy when we pull a boner, and generally makes himself useful as a business manager as well as a steady and loyal friend in time of need. For all this, mine have my love and blessings